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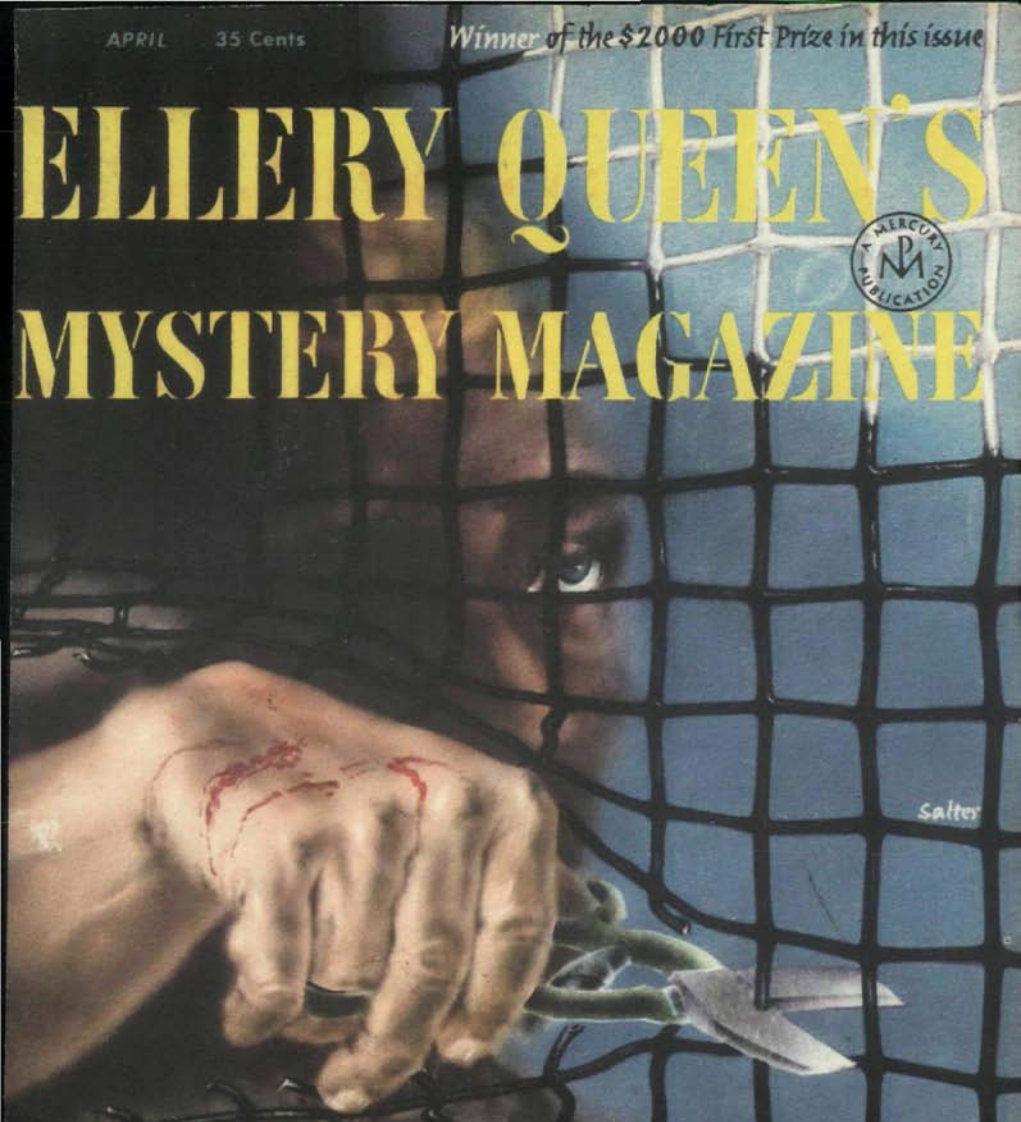

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PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 24, No. 125, APRIL 1954. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

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Complete List of the 53 Prize-Winning Stories in EQMM's Ninth Annual Contest

THE BEST DETECTIVE-CRIME-MYSTERY SHORT STORIES OF 1954

FIRST PRIZE

Double Image	by Roy Vickers

SECOND PRIZES

The House Party	by Stanley Ellin
You Know What, Teacher?	by Zenna Henderson
Backward, Turn Backward	by Dorothy Salisbury Davis
The Man Out of the Rain	by Philip MacDonald
There Are No Snakes in Hawaii	by Juanita Sheridan
The Couple Next Door	by Margaret Millar

THIRD PRIZES

Wild Goose Chase	by John Ross Macdonald
The Dipping of the Candlemaker	by Hayden Howard
Mom in the Spring	by James Yaffe
Due Process	by Harry Miner
Chain of Witnesses	by Phyllis Bentley
Autopsy and Eva	by Stuart Palmer & Craig Rice

HONOR ROLL: SHORT STORIES

A Case of Catnapping	by A. H. Z. Carr
The Pale Sergeant	by Henry Myers
Anything New on the Strangler?	by James M. Ullman
I Always Get the Cuties	by John D. MacDonald
At Midnight, In the Month of June	by Ray Bradbury
Payment in Full	by Dion Henderson
When Are People Going to Learn?	by John F. Suter
Glitter of Diamonds	by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding
Follow the Leader	by Dorothy Dunn
The Ninth Circle	by Robert Lewis
The Body in the Pool	by Rufus King
Noel, Noel	by Barry Perowne

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The Tougher They Come	by Ben Ray Redman
The Judgment of En-Lil	by Miriam Allen deFord

HONOR ROLL: SHORT-SHORT STORIES

Tall Story	by Margery Allingham
Banquet and a Half	by Lee Hays
Heat Spell	by John L. Hayward
April Fool	by Mark Van Doren
Best of Friends	by Babette Rosmond
The Crate at Outpost 1	by Matthew Gant
A Matter of Scholarship	by Anthony Boucher
Bad Check	by Hodding Carter
Exhibit A	by William O'Farrell
Hail and Farewell	by Peter Godfrey
Duello	by Stephen Barr

SPECIAL POSTHUMOUS AWARD

Claude Diphthong, Student of Crime	by Ring Lardner

SPECIAL AWARDS FOR "FIRST STORIES"

BEST OF THE YEAR

The Day of the Last Rock Fight	by Joseph Whitehill

RUNNERS-UP

By His Own Act	by Emily Jackson
Socrates Solves a Murder	by Brèni James
Mrs. Jellison	by Sara Henderson Hay
The Mirror of the Man	by Jan Thompson
Nothing Will Hurt You, Lucy	by Luttrell Tucker
Two-Bit Gangster	by Thomas Millstead
Wake Up and Live	by Michael Sands
Probation	by Marian Lloyd Dix
On the Very Street You Live	by Fred Charap
The Black Ruby	by William D. Gent
The Detective	by Kristin Field
To Bury a Friend	by Stanley Anton
Whistling While You Work	by William Link & Richard Levinson

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WINNER OF FIRST PRIZE

Roy Vickers needs no introduction to readers of EQMM. He is the creator of the Department of Dead Ends, that pertinacious, elephant-memoried bureau of Scotland Yard. On both sides of the Atlantic, critics have agreed that the tales of the D.D.E. are the finest "inverted" detective stories written since Dr. R. Austin Freeman invented the form back in 1912. Indeed, it is no stretch of critical opinion to say that Roy Vickers's three volumes, THE DEPARTMENT OF DEAD ENDS, MURDER WILL OUT, *and* EIGHT MURDERS IN THE SUBURBS, *are contemporary classics in the detective short-story field.*

Now one of Mr. Vickers's stories has won First Prize in an EQMM Annual Contest — and to quote an Americanism, "It couldn't have happened to a better guy." The First Prize story is not a tale of the Department of Dead Ends, but it is blood-brother to that great series. Surely, Inspector Thurtle in "Double Image" could be the guiding genius of the D.D.E. (and perhaps will be one day); surely the story itself has that same authenticity of photographic detail, that same imaginative realism shot through with the credible fantasy which occurs so often in real life. But "Double Image" is even more: it is a tour de force in the truest sense of the term.

From the very first page you will walk a 'tec tightrope, precariously balanced between the believable on one hand and the unbelievable on the other. We are willing to predict that you will never be absolutely sure until the end just what to think, just what to believe about Julian Fanshaw's twin.

Yes, this is a story about twins. Would you have thought it possible for any writer in this day and age to conceive a new and fascinating wrinkle about twins? At least two experts have gone on record that twins are taboo. In his "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories," which first appeared in 1928, S. S. Van Dine said in Rule 20: "And I herewith list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective-story writer will now avail himself of. They have been employed too often and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author's ineptitude and lack of originality" — and in subdivision (f), Van Dine stated: "The final pinning of the crime on a twin" is a positive "don't" in "the rules of the game."

Then, in his famous "Ten Commandments of Detection," which first

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appeared in 1929, Ronald A. Knox offered as his tenth rule: "Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them."

Well, in "Double Image," Mr. Vickers duly prepares you! He also proves there are no rules of technique or subject matter that cannot be broken by a talented craftsman — indeed, we have often preached that the only true value of "don'ts" is that they give the really imaginative writer a challenging opportunity to "do."

Do the twins in "Double Image," according to one past expert, imply that Roy Vickers has no artistic self-respect, is inept, and lacks originality? Well, dear reader, judge for yourself — we have already expressed our opinion. It is true that the First Prize winner this year has no "big theme," no social significance; it is simply a brilliant detective story, an ingenious variation of the "inverted" technique; and it generates an intellectual suspense seldom achieved by anyone less than a master of the craft.

DOUBLE IMAGE

by ROY VICKERS

THERE ARE SOME TRUTHS WHICH the public invariably labels fictional. For instance, the Fanshaw murder mystery pivoted on the murderer being so like Julian Fanshaw that the latter's wife, Elsa, could fail to notice the difference. The public, bypassing the evidence, said that no wife could make that mistake and wondered why the police believed such a childish tale. The police, of course, do not commonly accept a tall tale in lieu of an alibi . . .

Seen from the outside, the Fanshaws were an ordinary young couple who lived in the well appointed suburb of Rubington. They had a pleasant eight-room house, with more than half an acre of garden. A strange talent for getting and keeping competent help insured a smooth domesticity.

In the first week in October, Elsa announced at breakfast that she was going to Town for a day's shopping.

Her husband said he would squeeze in the time to give her lunch at Blainley's Restaurant, at 1 o'clock. On the train she fell in with a neighbor, Gwenda Blagrove, and eventually brought her along to Blainley's, believing that her husband would be pleased, as Gwenda's husband had been of use to Fanshaw in the city. The Fanshaws' marriage had been satisfactory, so far. Elsa was sufficiently good-looking to seem beautiful to any

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man who liked her mental and emotional make-up. She kept her moods to herself. So did her husband. True, they had settled into a jog-trot of absent-minded affection. He had ceased to notice her dress and she had taught herself to laugh at the right time without actually listening to his stories. For five years they had rippled along, stretching their income but avoiding really dangerous debt. A substantial sum, reverting to Julian on the death of an uncle, discouraged saving.

The two women turned up at the restaurant ahead of time. At eleven minutes to 1, they were waiting in the entrance hall, which was somewhat crowded. At nine minutes to 1, Elsa exclaimed:

"There's Julian! He hasn't seen us, but he's coming this way."

Julian Fanshaw was easy to pick out of a crowd, so Elsa always saw him before he saw her. He was taller than most men and he had the well-developed chest and overdeveloped shoulder muscles that come from rowing for one's university. His face was large, lean, and amiable, with a dimple in his chin. He went to a good tailor and his lounge suits were always of the same steely gray — the precise shade of which, Elsa said, she had never seen on any other man. His lightweight overcoats were cut from the same material. There was a touch of individuality even in his broad-brimmed Homburg.

"He has seen you, but not me," corrected Gwenda — a trivial remark which later acquired a certain importance. "We'd better stand still, or we shall be dodging each other."

The tall man with the steely gray clothes and the dimpled chin was weaving towards them.

"Julian! I've persuaded Gwenda to join us for lunch. We were both —"

The man she addressed did not ignore her. He seemed to assume that she was speaking across him to someone else. He looked into her eyes, doffed his hat, gave her a stranger's smile, murmured "Sorry!" and moved toward the cloak room, leaving Elsa to gape at the overdeveloped shoulder muscles under the gray overcoat. The overcoat seemed to be not quite the same, but she couldn't be sure.

Gwenda was muttering to herself. Elsa looked frightened.

"You thought it was Julian, too," Elsa almost whispered. "You were just going to speak to him."

"It *was* Julian! You can't mistake another man for your own husband!"

"But I did! Though, when he turned his back I did think the overcoat was of a different material, even if it was practically the same shade."

"His overcoat! Has Julian a twin brother?"

"No. He is a twin, but the other died when they were babies. It must be his double."

"Nobody can be as double as all that!"

Yet, there it was. Elsa felt as many have felt immediately after an accident — that she must force herself backward in time to the moment be-

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fore it happened. Gwenda was still explaining about doubles when —at six minutes to 1 — Elsa felt a hand on her arm.

Julian again? Or just Julian?

"Julian! I've persuaded Gwenda to join us for lunch." She was saying it over again. "We were both going to the same shops —"

"Splendid! Sorry you've been waiting but I'm still five minutes to the good. I'll just dump my coat."

After a civil exchange with Gwenda he hurried off before they could tell him about the other Julian. Elsa brought it up at lunch. In spite of Gwenda's corroboration, it sounded like a small-talk exaggeration. Julian mumbled politely about it.

"But don't you see it's terrific!" cried Gwenda. "Elsa was as sure as I was that it was you! She says you actually are a twin."

"Yes, that does give a tang to it," grinned Julian. "Unfortunately, my twin lived for only two days, statutory — my father told me it was twenty-six hours."

"Were you born at home?"

"We were born at St. Seiriol's."

"Where hundreds are born every day."

"Not hundreds every day — tens, perhaps. I can guess what you're thinking. But a mix-up of babies is such a likely thing to happen that it would be happening almost daily — if they didn't have a foolproof system for tabbing them. Nothing there!"

At home that evening, Elsa's chatter lost its bubble.

"What's on your mind, darling? You were shopping today. If someone has stopped your credit, we can probably fix it up."

"It's that double of yours! You didn't really listen when Gwenda and I told you about him. He almost brushed against me. Our eyes met and I still thought he was you. He said 'Sorry' in the same muttering tone you use. And he was dressed in exactly your gray, with the same cut, though the material itself may have been different. It's as if he must have been your identical twin."

Julian frowned.

"Apart from anything else, we have no evidence that my twin brother was an identical. So, darling, you won't start something on that, will you? I mean the one about the nurses having changed the babies and one day the true earl turns up to claim the titles and estate. At the moment we have neither title nor estate for a missing heir to claim. And anyway, I am the elder brother."

"You're laughing at me!"

"Just a little. I don't disbelieve your yarn. Only, there's nothing we can do about it except keep on agreeing that it's all most extraordinary. So let's forget it!"

On the evening of the following day, Julian, who was very regular in his habits, failed to appear at the usual time. Within an hour, Elsa was waiting in the porch.

"Julian! Has something awful happened?"

"My dear girl! I'm barely an hour

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late. Just missed the train, that's all. I had a slack afternoon, so I thought I'd pop around the corner for a heart-to-heart talk with Uncle Ernest. The awful thing — if any — is that he is in rude health. We shall be middle-aged before we benefit."

Later in the evening he expanded.

"Things have been rather tight the last six months. Some of my best clients are asking for longer credit, and they ought to have it. Obviously, the sensible thing is for me to realize at least part of my interest under the reversion. I can't do it without Uncle Ernest's consent. So I offered to pay him five hundred if he would authorize me to borrow ten thousand. It's pure gain for him — he loses nothing and risks nothing."

"How did he take it?"

"He was very sour. Gave me a pi-jaw about living too extravagantly. I told him we didn't — because we don't!"

"I could manage with only Mrs. Benson. And we could do nearly all the gardening ourselves."

"We could not. And it isn't necessary. There's no crisis. It's simply that I'm pegged down for lack of a spot of extra capital."

Which was only a different way of putting it, thought Elsa.

"Julian! Never mind how silly I am, please answer! If that man really is your twin — in spite of all the reasons why he can't be — would he share in the money on your uncle's death?"

"If I had a brother, which I have not, we would split." Julian was scornful. "On the utterly fantastic premise that my brother is alive, why doesn't he show up and make a fuss about it? Why lurk about and dress like me and play bogeyman at you?"

They talked no more about the double until the following evening, when Mrs. Hebbleton rang Elsa.

Insofar as Rubington possessed a social leader, Mrs. Hebbleton filled the role. Of moderate intelligence and immoderate energy, she became president or secretary of most local activities, and enjoyed every minute of it.

"Mrs. Hebbleton says she buttonholed you near the railway station yesterday evening —"

"She did not!"

"— that you had come off the 6:05 as usual, that you accepted for us to dine there next Thursday, and that she handed you the nominal roll of the tennis club to give to me, and I'd promised to do some of the letters."

Julian was obliged to admit that this must be the handiwork of the double.

"That chap," said Julian, "is playing a game of his own. Turning up at Blainley's when you were there *and* doing this stunt in Rubington where you live — both can no longer be chance. Why didn't he tell Mrs. Hebbleton his name isn't Fanshaw?"

"But supposing it is?"

"Don't bring that up again, darling. Whatever his name is, we're going to look silly."

Next day, over morning coffee, Mrs. Hebbleton came to the point.

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"Gwenda told me an extraordinary story about your mistaking another man for your husband, though what use our nominal roll can be to him, if he is *not* your husband —"

"Gwenda mistook him, too," put in Elsa.

"In a crowded restaurant, perhaps," conceded Mrs. Hebbleton. "But I'm sure that you will understand that I must ask you to prepare another nominal roll."

"I will, with pleasure. But Gwenda was as close to him as I was."

"It's all very peculiar indeed, but I shall expect you both on Thursday, all the same," said Mrs. Hebbleton magnanimously. "If there really is a double impersonating your husband, I imagine you will take steps."

"I don't see what we can do."

"Do you think it's ever true that one can do nothing?" said Mrs. Hebbleton. "Why not apply to the police for protection? Superintendent Norris is a very capable man. If you care to mention my name, I'm sure he'll do something for you."

Thus goaded, Elsa unfolded her tale to the local superintendent, who disconcerted her by making notes.

"Let's take the restaurant incident first, Mrs. Fanshaw. Between the two appearances, you tell me, there was an interval of three minutes. In that time Mr. Fanshaw could — I don't say he did, mind — I say he *could* have gone out by a side door and come in again by the main door. To play a practical joke on you ladies. And he might have been continuing the joke with Mrs. Hebbleton. By the way, I suppose Mr. Fanshaw hasn't a twin brother?"

"He did have" — and Elsa told the little tale about the short-lived baby.

"Then that's out of it," said the superintendent, nevertheless making a note of it.

"Mrs. Hebbleton," said Elsa to her husband that night, "thinks she runs Rubington, because she's rumored to be a cousin of the Duke of Sheffield. Before marriage her name was Jennifer Maud Carmaenham. I wish you'd look her up in *Who's Who* — there's sure to be a copy at your club."

"Aren't you being catty, darling?"

"Yes, and I'm liking it. She as good as said that there's no double — that it's only you playing the fool. And she practically forced me to go to the local police." She added an account of her interview with the local superintendent.

Julian's reaction was disappointing. In silence he took a postcard from his pocket, on which he made calculations of time.

"The superintendent is on solid ground," he pronounced. "The attitude of that woman is asinine, of course, but we can't defend ourselves. I can't prove I was somewhere else at the relevant times." He added gloomily, "This might damage us quite a lot. If that chap crops up again, I shall consider taking legal advice."

The next incident touched on the business relations of the Fanshaws, uncle and nephew.

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Julian was a slow-transport agent. If you wished to move a wardrobe or a ton of fertilizer or whatnot to the next town, or to an obscure island in the Pacific, without incurring the cost of express delivery, Julian Fanshaw was your man. He had maps and technical charts showing the most inexpensive way of sending goods from almost any spot on earth to almost any other.

Ernest Fanshaw, who was a fuel agent specializing in the less common fuels, occasionally employed the services of his nephew. As their offices were within a minute's walk, they were in the habit of calling on each other and doing their business personally, to preserve the family courtesies.

John Thwaites, Ernest Fanshaw's elderly head clerk, who had many of the qualities of a family retainer, was shocked when Julian presented himself at 3 in the afternoon and asked if his uncle were disengaged.

Mr. Thwaites looked surprised.

"But Mr. Julian! He's very busy just now, and he wasn't really pleased when you dropped in this morning to see him."

"But I did *not* drop in this morning!"

The clerk, after careful scrutiny, could find no sign of excessive drinking.

"Mr. Julian, I myself showed you in!"

"Mr. Thwaites, this is damned serious!"

Julian strode into the private office and opened the door. Ernest Fanshaw, who had been dozing in his chair, opened his eyes and blinked.

"Sorry, Uncle. Thwaites says he showed me into this room this morning. I was not here this morning. I have been impersonated. I'll tell you all about it —"

After some confusion they reached bedrock.

"Let us be precise," said Ernest Fanshaw. "On Tuesday afternoon you called here to make an improper offer about the reversion. This morning, sitting where you are sitting now, you tried a new approach to the same subject. Before you left this room I produced your account for the sum of forty-three pounds, twelve shillings, apologizing for having neglected to settle it before, and gave you a check for that amount. Are you telling me you have forgotten? Feel in your pocket."

"Uncle Ernest! If it was a blank check you've probably lost your money. If it was a check made out to me, 'phone the bank now and have it stopped."

When the bank had been warned, Julian told his tale, to which his uncle listened with impatience.

"I've never heard anything so damned ridiculous! This double — as you call him — how the devil could he know anything about that reversion?"

"I haven't the ghost of a notion, but I do know that he has nosed out a lot of details of my business and domestic affairs. He has made a fool

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of me in Rubington, impersonating me to our friends."

It was his nephew's tone that impressed Ernest and inclined him to take notice.

"Julian! It has suddenly struck me — d'you think it possible that something slipped in the hospital, and that your twin brother —"

"I've given up guessing. After this, I shall see my lawyer and hit back if I can."

Julian told Elsa about it — then slipped in the unwelcome information that *Who's Who* fully authenticated Mrs. Hebbleton's claim to be the cousin of a duke.

"Anyhow, she'll have to believe now that there's a double, duke or no duke."

A couple of days later, Miss Hackett, Julian's secretary, came into his room, looking slightly offended. He had first met Miss Hackett when he was a small boy on a visit to the office. On his father's sudden death, while Julian was at Cambridge, she had proved herself a very competent manager. She was content to continue as Julian's secretary and office aunt.

"Mr. Thwaites has been on the 'phone with a very mysterious message," she said, with disapproval. "Your uncle asks you to meet him at his bank in ten minutes. It's very urgent. And there is no explanation."

In the manager's room, Julian was shown the check for £43 12/, which had been cashed through a Post Office savings account.

"The endorsement certainly looks like my signature. But I know that I did not endorse that check, and anyway I have no Post Office account, so I declare the endorsement a forgery."

The manager, applying a routine test, agreed that the signature had been traced and insisted on calling the police. Julian, eager to cooperate, volunteered to go with the police to the branch post office, warning them that he would be identified as the forger. They were so alike, he told them, that his own wife had made a mistake.

Pursuing the twin-brother theory which they themselves had propounded, the police visited St. Seiriol's Hospital, Westminster, where Julian had been born. The records showed that there had been five male babies born within an hour of the twins and a total of eleven males and seven females — with one male death — within 26 hours. But the routine for preventing a confusion of babies was so thorough that the possibility of a mistake was untenable.

There remained the thin chance that a nurse might have tampered with the routine, robbing the mother of twins in pity for the bereaved mother of a singleton. So the police worked on the list of nurses and patients of 29 years ago. Five of the nurses had died, and more than half the number of parents were untraceable.

They interviewed Elsa and were impressed. Gwenda Blagrove's testi-

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mony added nothing. Mrs. Hebbleton challenged them to explain why the double should want the nominal roll of the tennis club. The local superintendent agreed that it was incredible that Mr. Fanshaw should play such a clownish trick on his uncle, and promised to keep a sharp lookout in Rubington.

After a blank week the papers of the case came before Chief Inspector Thurtle, who sent a courteous request to Julian to call at Scotland Yard.

Thurtle had the appearance of a prosperous family man who is bullied by his daughters. Many of his earlier successes were due to his talent for inspiring confidence.

"Our chief difficulty is that all roads lead back to you, Mr. Fanshaw — such as that post office clerk identifying you yourself as the double. I thought pr'aps you'd like to let us have your fingerprints — for your own sake."

Julian thanked him and had his prints taken.

"Forty-three quid odd," resumed Thurtle, "seems a very poor target for an elaborate stunt like this. He dresses himself up like you, and that alone would cost more than thirty. And why does he force himself on your wife's attention at a restaurant? And why the practical joke on Mrs. Hebbleton? Of course, we have to deal with the fact of forgery. But, between you and me, it looks more like a hoax. That suggests he may be your twin brother nursing a grievance, in spite of what the hospital people say."

Julian was unresponsive.

"If he's my brother, why doesn't he show up in a friendly way? He would have a strong moral claim on us."

"Would he be entitled to any money?"

"There's no immediate money. But there's a reversion on my uncle's death — nominal value about fifty thousand pounds — which he would share equally with me."

Thurtle said this was important and took a note of details.

"We have to find a means of separating your movements from his, Mr. Fanshaw. Now, he was getting that check out of your uncle at about twenty past 12 on the morning of the fourteenth. You were in your office at that time, I suppose?"

"Probably — just a minute!" Julian produced a pocket diary. "The fourteenth . . . I have an entry — *Who's Who* —" He smiled. "My wife had asked me to look up a social reference. So I went to my club, leaving the office at 12. I walked, so I must have got there — The Junior Commonwealth, Mendover Street — about ten past."

"Can you give me something to check on, just for the record?" Then Thurtle added, "That's a large club and I don't suppose the staff ticks off every member — there'd be a good many coming in at the time. You had lunch with somebody?"

"N-no, I had a standup in the snack

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bar — don't remember running into any of my own clique there. On the way to the reading room I nodded to one or two slight acquaintances. I doubt whether they'll remember."

They did not remember. Thurtle's check-up at the club yielded no one, of membership or staff, who could state positively that Julian Fanshaw was or was not there on the morning of the fourteenth.

Thurtle followed up with inquiries in Rubington, intensive but fruitless. He called on Ernest Fanshaw and enlisted the latter's cooperation. Then he sent Fanshaw another equally courteous request to call at the Yard.

When Julian had seated himself and accepted a cigarette, Thurtle reported his total lack of progress in any direction — then waited for Julian to say something.

"Awkward for me." Julian braced himself. "Let's face it, Inspector. Like Mrs. Hebbleton, you suspect that I myself have stuned this 'double' as a practical joke?"

"Not as a practical joke."

Julian looked puzzled.

Thurtle went on: "Take the build-up of this 'double' of yours — or identical twin, if you like. He must have staged the incident at Blainley's Restaurant — same applies to Mrs. Hebbleton and her tennis papers — and to that prank with the forty-three quid check. Builds up a half-lunatic who might do anything." Thurtle paused. "For instance, he might murder your uncle — and leave you to collect the fifty thousand quid!"

Julian removed his cigarette and stared at it.

"Let's take this slowly, Inspector. You don't believe this fellow exists. You suggest that 'he' might murder my uncle — meaning that *I* might murder my uncle —"

"Put it this way, Mr. Fanshaw. I'm warning you that if you have any such fantasy in your brain, you'd do well to get rid of it."

Julian laughed loudly and long.

"It's a great idea, Inspector! I scupper Uncle Ernest and plant the murder on a ghost!"

"Just so. Our job is to prevent crime, when we can."

"You do it very thoroughly," sighed Julian. "If I had had any such plan — fantasy, you rightly called it — you would have dished it."

He got up and moved towards the door.

"The police have done a lot of work on this job — which you believe to be a hoax on my part. Am I to be charged with 'creating a public mischief' — if that's what it's called?"

"We have no immediate intention of making that charge, Mr. Fanshaw."

"Haven't you!" Julian smiled. "*I wonder why!*"

There were no developments during the next fortnight. Elsa no longer asked every evening if there were news of the double. Routine was restored. Fifteen days after the incident of the forged check Julian announced that he intended to go to Manchester the following afternoon — a Tuesday

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— in the hope of nailing an important new client, and that he would stay the night, returning home at the usual time on Wednesday evening.

In the middle of Tuesday afternoon Elsa heard a latchkey and ran into the hall.

"Julian! I thought you were going to Manchester?"

"Washout. 'Phone call just as I was leaving the office. I had made arrangements with Miss Hackett, so I thought I'd knock off, just the same."

"What've you done with your suitcase, Julian?" Her voice was the least bit unsteady.

"Damn! Left it at the office. Never mind!"

Mrs. Benson was making a clatter in the kitchen. Even so, she would hear a scream. Elsa saw that he had guessed her thought. He looked angry, but she did not flinch.

"How do I know you *are* Julian?"

"You don't, I guess. And you never will know, because there's no means of telling you. 'I am myself' — what the devil does it mean? Nothing!" His anger seemed to be lost in self-pity. "I am not just like one man but thousands. My conversation is the same as theirs, my habits, my very gestures. And we all whisper the same things to our wives. Why is it remarkable that some of us should have the same face?" He laughed as a man who laughs at himself. "But if it's the problem of my face that's worrying you, perhaps you noticed at breakfast this morning that I had nicked myself while shaving. Look closely — left side, near the ear — and if you can find a trace of the nick, treasure it. It's my solitary claim to individuality."

"Don't work yourself up over nothing, Julian!" Elsa felt ashamed of herself. "After all, I was wrong about you once!"

"Sorry, darling. It was your question that upset me. I thought you meant it seriously. Perhaps you did — don't tell me! The truth is, this wretched 'double' business is getting us down. Let's snap out of it for a few hours. I vote we have a nice, noisy evening in Town. Elsa — *Elsa!*" His voice pushed aside the five years of jog-trot, leaving her dizzy.

They used the car, to eliminate the rush for the last train. Neighbors, the Brigstocks, saw them dining at Blainley's, and thought that they seemed absorbed in each other — which was true.

They went to a musical show and afterwards to a night club. He noticed her dress. She listened to his stories and laughed because she was amused. She set herself to engage his whole attention. When they had returned to Rubington, she was still effervescent. They were acutely conscious of each other.

Next morning, he was the first up and about. By the time Elsa came downstairs Mrs. Benson had brought in breakfast and placed his overcoat and hat in readiness for him in the hall — the staff was always devoted to Julian. A thin beam of sunlight, filtering through the glass panel in the front door, rested on the overcoat.

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Elsa looked at the coat — then passed on as if she had not seen it. On the hall table, as usual, was a copy of the *Times*. She opened a drawer, took out an ancient pair of scissors with which she would often cut out the crossword puzzle before Julian whisked it off to the office — and the next instant turned back to the coat. It was the right shade; but the material, she thought, was different — the same difference she had noted in the coat of the 'double,' that day at Blainley's Restaurant.

"How utterly ridiculous! It's the effect of the sun on it!" The thought was unspoken, but she laughed aloud — laughed a second time as she stopped herself from fingering the material. She positively bounced into breakfast.

She began to chatter. She made a casual remark about one of their friends. His mumbled answer confused her by its irrelevance. Her thoughts flew back to the coat in the hall. In the next few seconds she felt the blood rushing to her head. She steadied, pushed back her chair. The same words came unbidden.

"How do I know you *are* Julian?"

Their eyes met, fanning her panic.

"You can say that to me, Elsa, after all that has passed between us — since yesterday afternoon?"

"*You're stalling!*" It was almost a whisper. "If you're Julian, tell me the name of my bridesmaid — the pet-name we've always used."

"A test question!" He laughed. "After five years and two months of marriage, you need a password to tell you the difference between your husband and another man of the same appearance. It proves what I was saying yesterday —"

"Why don't you answer?"

"For one of two reasons. Either I am not your husband and don't know the answer. Or I am your husband and see no point in answering. Think it over, Elsa, and you'll find that it doesn't matter a damn to you whether I'm Julian Fanshaw or his twin brother."

He got up and walked out.

Elsa sagged in her chair. Had she insulted both Julian and herself? It was one thing to mistake the other man for Julian for a few seconds in Blainley's Restaurant. But last night! As if she could have the slightest doubt! Why, the thing was a psychological absurdity! She did not move until Mrs. Benson came in to clear the breakfast table.

Towards the end of the morning it dawned on her that she could remove all doubt by ringing his office. But she must choose her words carefully. Secretaries were very careful of what they said to wives about husbands.

She looked up the train schedule to Manchester. There was a dining-car express arriving in London at 2:45. Julian would take that train — *if* he were in Manchester.

"Oh, Miss Hackett!" she was saying, at a few minutes past two. "Is Julian back yet?" — a question which might have referred to lunch.

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"No, Mrs. Fanshaw. He said he would probably take the midday express from Manchester, so he should be here about 3. Shall I ask him to ring you?"

"No, thanks — it's of no importance, and I shall be out at 3."

So much for the psychological absurdity! All emotion had spent itself and she faced with detachment the riddle of what to say to Julian.

Actually, she said nothing. Julian came home at the usual time. Watching him from the window, she thought he looked haggard. When she met him in the hall he burst into a heartiness that was wholly unconvincing.

"Hullo, darling! Had a good day? I came down with Brigstock. Says he saw us at Blainley's last night — they were three tables away, apparently — couldn't catch our eye — eyes, I mean. I told him you and I were having an evening out together for a change. Not a bad evening either, eh? Shan't be long."

He hurried upstairs, carrying his suitcase. She had said nothing, and he had not noticed her silence.

He had picked up the truth from Brigstock, she concluded, and wished to spare her feelings. But perhaps that was not quite his style — in their five years, all his little kindnesses had been trumpeted. More probably he found the facts humiliating to himself and wished to avoid discussion. She would play along.

On the last Monday in November, six weeks after the incident of the forged check, Ernest Fanshaw's head clerk overheard what he took to be the voice of Julian Fanshaw speaking to the reception girl. Through the window, he noted the steely gray overcoat and the wide-brimmed Homburg affected by Julian Fanshaw, and under his arm a folded newspaper, obviously the *Times*. The clocks were striking 11.

"Good morning, Mr. Thwaites. Do you think Uncle Ernest could spare me five minutes, or are you working him too hard?"

"Ah! Your uncle doesn't need anybody to make him work." He spoke on the office telephone. "Mr. Julian is here, sir. . . . Very good, sir. Will you go right through, Mr. Julian."

Ernest Fanshaw had been compelled by the logic of events to accept the idea of "the double" — which was repugnant to him. But as his inner door opened he forgot the double and saw only his nephew. He also forgot the arrangement made with Inspector Thurtle — which Thwaites was at that moment putting into action.

"Well, Julian! I hope you haven't come to talk about that reversion again?"

"Not literally, Uncle. The reversion can remain in the background of our thoughts." Julian spoke with one eye on the inner door, as if he expected interruption. "I want you to make me a personal loan of a thousand pounds."

The proposition was not fully expanded before the head clerk came

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in without knocking. He handed his employer a folded slip.

Ernest Fanshaw studied the slip with undisguised astonishment. He stared at his caller. Then he stared at his clerk.

"All right, Thwaites. Go ahead."

Before the clerk had shut the door, the slip, which had been refolded, was snatched from Ernest Fanshaw's fingers.

"What have we here, Uncle?" He read the message aloud: " 'By 'phone as directed: Miss Hackett states that Mr. Julian Fanshaw is in his office at this moment. J. Thwaites.' I guessed it — your face gave you away. So Thwaites is ringing the police, eh?"

"What happens to you will depend largely on the evidence I give about that check. You're Julian's twin, aren't you?"

"So I believe. Taking myself at my face value and adding a few dates and places." He began to open out the copy of the *Times* which he had brought with him. "There's an article here —"

"Sit down, sir! No doubt you believe yourself to have been ill-used. You may have been, but not by our family. In the circumstances, I am prepared to —"

The extent of Ernest Fanshaw's intended benevolence was never known, because, at that moment, he died in mid-sentence without even an audible groan. He was killed with an Army dagger, by the commando technique employed when it is necessary that an enemy sentry shall die before he can make any sound whatever.

The murderer had put on cuffed cleaning gloves, and had used the open copy of the *Times* to try to protect his clothes. But the cuff of the right-hand glove became bloodstained nevertheless. He shook the glove into the wastepaper basket. Then, with a quick intake of breath, he noticed a bloodstain on his overcoat too — close to the second button.

The stain was slight, but recognizable, and had obviously been made by contact with the cuff. He glanced round the room, picked up a copy of a magazine, leaving the *Times* on Ernest Fanshaw's desk. With his gloved left hand he then unlocked the door that gave on to the outside corridor. He shut and locked the door behind him. He folded the key in the left-hand glove and put it in a side pocket of his overcoat. The magazine, carried in a sufficiently natural manner, concealed the bloodstain near the second button.

It was now eight minutes past 11.

Like any other murderer, he had to escape from the scene of the crime before the police arrived. He achieved this purpose when he entered the taxi that was waiting for him.

"Back to where you picked me up — you remember? — just round the corner."

But like no other murderer, he wished to draw attention to his movements — for the next few minutes only. The taxi itself would be useful.

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No ordinary businessman would take a taxi for so short a distance, and keep it waiting to boot.

The taximan stopped outside the building containing Julian Fanshaw's office, where he had originally picked up his passenger. The meter registered two shillings. The taximan was handed a ten-shilling note.

"Keep the change."

The taximan would remember. But some taximen were very clever at keeping out of the witness box. Luck produced a squad of window cleaners about to enter the building.

"Are you the foreman? My name is Fanshaw — you'll see it on the doors upstairs. I want you to do my windows last."

The foreman was given a pound note. Twenty shillings, where five would have been adequate. The foreman would remember.

And there was more luck coming. On the staircase he met a man coming down. The latter happened to be Marberry, whose office was on the third floor, a personal acquaintance of Julian Fanshaw's.

"Hullo, Fanshaw! Looks as if you were right about Pretty Polly!"

"Hope so. I'm backing her to win."

Marberry blinked as the other passed on. "Pretty Polly" was not a racehorse, but their own nickname for Pritt-Polson, owner of the building, whom they had been pressing for certain structural improvements.

Now the luck was petering out. In the hall below there was a mild commotion. The window cleaner's voice and then Marberry's, explaining — obviously to the police. He caught the words "Pretty Polly." The taxi-driver was chipping in, too.

He had not expected the police here for at least another twenty minutes. He would have to hurry.

The fatal slip, of tradition, is often the result of an unconscious habit, a foible, an affectation which leads to identification and eventually to the gallows. The same principle operates, of course, in reverse — sometimes shielding the guilty, sometimes saving the innocent from arrest.

Julian might well have had no substantial alibi but for an odd little trick of carrying in his pockets unstamped postcards, on which he would make notes — both business and personal.

On the day of the murder he had arrived at his office half an hour earlier than usual. A client, who had bought a furniture business in bankruptcy, required two thousand items of furniture to be transported from Plymouth to London within seven months, and was clamoring for an estimate on slow delivery.

"This Baverbridge estimate will keep us on the hop," Julian said, when he and Miss Hackett had hurried through the morning mail. "I made some notes at home last night — and some more in the train, with some queries for you." He flicked out half a dozen postcards, held them fanwise like a poker hand, then put them back in his pocket. "Now where the devil did I put those notes —?"

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"In your overcoat pocket, I expect. Shall I look?"

"Please."

Julian's room was of the seedy type often affected by prosperous businessmen to convey that overheads are cut to a minimum for the benefit of the customer. The steely gray overcoat and wide-brimmed Homburg hung inelegantly on the wall between an early-model rolltop desk and a gaunt metal cupboard some six feet high, deemed to be fireproof. The walls were quite clean, but the carpet was nearly threadbare and one of the floorboards creaked.

Miss Hackett felt in the breast pocket of the overcoat and produced another poker hand of postcards.

"That's it. You might pencil in the answers, in case I get an idea when I'm not in the office. I'll be in the chart room if anything really urgent crops up."

The chart room was the powerhouse of the firm. It was lined with wall maps, several of which Julian now removed to the long table. There were special filing cabinets for the charts, a couple of fireproof cupboards, and a single chair. Considered as a room, it was the best in the suite, with an inner and outer door, whereas Julian's room was a mere annex of Miss Hackett's, with no outer door.

Thus Julian went through Miss Hackett's room, across the interior corridor containing a peephole window labeled *Inquiries*, through the typists' room to the chart room. He always went that way to the chart room and always made the return journey through the outer door of the chart room and the outer corridor, thereby completing a loop when he reached the interior corridor — another little idiosyncrasy which Miss Hackett had noted with aunt-like indulgence.

In half an hour — that is, by 11 o'clock — Miss Hackett had looked up the references and filled in the blanks and queries on the overcoat postcards. She took the cards into Julian's room and put them on his desk. Then, reminding herself that he would probably drop something on top of them and leave the office without them, she picked the cards up again and put them back in the breast pocket of his overcoat. The telephone rang as she returned to her own room.

"Good morning, Miss Hackett. Mr. Thwaites speaking for Mr. Ernest Fanshaw. Is Mr. Julian in the office, please?"

"Yes, Mr. Thwaites. He's in the chart room. I can't switch you through, as there's no extension. If you'll wait a minute —"

"Don't disturb him, please. My chief only wishes to know if he is there. I think he will call on Mr. Julian later in the morning. Thank you, Miss Hackett."

At 11:10 a junior typist brought Miss Hackett a glass of milk which she took in obedience to her doctor, disliking it. She started on a letter. One paragraph, one gulp. As she finished the milk she was again interrupted.

"Everything o-kay, Miss Hackett?"

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It was a meaningless question. Julian, she told herself, was getting flustered over this Baverbridge estimate.

"I've been over your notes and I've put the cards back in your overcoat pocket." Then she added, "Your uncle is coming to see you some time today."

"We're too busy. Ring him back, but be diplomatic. Say I'll look in on him on my way up tomorrow."

He passed on to his own room, shutting the door behind him. Miss Hackett dialed Ernest Fanshaw, but the number was busy. She was halfway through the next letter when she heard a step in the reception corridor which did not stop at *Inquiries*. Her door was opened by a man in early middle-age and of benign appearance.

"I am Detective Inspector Thurtle. May I speak to Mr. Fanshaw, please?"

"I'll tell him you're here." Miss Hackett went into Julian's room, closely followed by Thurtle. The room was empty.

"Did you expect Mr. Fanshaw to be in this room, Miss Hackett?"

"Yes. He came here from the chart room a few minutes ago. He spoke to me, then went into his room. He must have gone back to the chart room while I was on the telephone and I didn't notice. Will you follow me, please!"

She took him through the typists' room. When she opened the inner door of the chart room, Julian did not look up. He was seated sideways at the long table, a writing pad on his knee since there was no room for it on the table, which was covered with maps, removed from the wall, and now opened out and fluttering in the draught.

"I believe we can do the whole job by coaster — hullo, Inspector."

"Good morning, Mr. Fanshaw."

Miss Hackett retired, shutting the door behind her. Julian tore a sheet from the writing pad, clipped it to similar sheets of notes.

"Take this chair, Inspector," he invited, rising.

Thurtle did not move. He was gazing at the other with something approaching awe. He meant to be curt and official, but he actually spoke like a human being.

"*Why* didn't you take my warning? It was madness to go through with it."

"Last time we met, Inspector," said Julian, with controlled exasperation, "you told me you believed that I had faked my own 'double.' And you warned me not to murder my uncle. Are you now telling me that my uncle *has* been murdered — and that I have murdered him?"

"If you want to play it that way — yes, to both questions."

"Well, I'm damned! Poor old Uncle Ernest! As you don't believe the double exists, you've come to arrest me?"

"Unless you can account for your movements between 11 o'clock this morning and the present moment — and answer my questions satisfactorily."

"I turned up here about 9:30 and I

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haven't left the office. Doesn't leave much scope for questions, does it?"

Thurtle shrugged. His familiar task had suddenly become distasteful.

"To save a lot of cross-talk, I'll tell you what you're up against." Thurtle told him about the taxi, about Thwaites, about the latter telephoning Miss Hackett — about the window cleaners' foreman and the encounter with Marberry.

"Marberry spoke to you. And you gave him a funny answer about 'Pretty Polly' — a clever touch that, to clinch the 'double' idea. And you gave it more and more build-up by leaving a trail through the taximan and the window cleaners — to suggest that if you were the murderer you wouldn't be such a fool as to leave a trail of your movements at the most dangerous time."

"Of course I wouldn't!" laughed Julian. "How does it go on?"

"The man who got out of that taxi and came into this building is still in this building — and he can't get out."

"Meaning me?" Julian offered his wrists, as if for handcuffs. "What are you waiting for?"

"All right, if you want to drag it out! How long had you been sitting in that chair when Miss Hackett brought me in?"

"I haven't left this room since I entered it about 10:30."

"Miss Hackett says you were talking to her in her room a few minutes before I turned up."

"I was not!" cried Julian. "But if Miss Hackett said it, she *believed* it to be true. Did she say that I then left her and went back to this room?"

"She said you went into that inner room off hers — she thought you were still there."

"And she went into that inner room?"

"Of course she did! So did I. It was empty."

"Did you look in the fireproof cupboard? It's big enough to hold a man."

Thurtle turned sharply to the door, then checked himself.

"There was no man in that cupboard, Fanshaw. You're trying to suggest it was the 'double' who spoke to Miss Hackett?"

"What for? In the hope of convincing you?"

"You're not bothering about me — you're setting the stage for the jury." When Julian made no answer, Thurtle went on: "We can't search this building properly until the office workers have left. So you can go on stalling us until about 7 this evening."

Thurtle left the chart room by the outer door, waited in the corridor until Sergeant Boyce reported.

"Four floors and a basement. Total of six offices. We've been through them all, everybody cooperating. The basement gives on to a blind wall approached through the caretaker's living quarters. So the only way out is by the front. Window cleaners will be here most of the day. I've asked 'em to keep their eyes open."

News of the murder had by now reached Julian's staff. Thurtle found it

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necessary to condole with Miss Hackett — whereupon she recovered her office manner and proved herself an ideal witness. Like many of her kind she was time-conscious. She explained that the routine had been slightly affected by the Baverbridge estimate.

"It was close to half-past 10 when Mr. Fanshaw went to the chart room. By 11 I had finished working on his notes. I made the entries on his postcards" — Miss Hackett smiled on the word — "then took them into his room. Then Mr. Thwaites rang — that would be a minute or so after 11 — asking if Mr. Julian were in the office. Next, the junior brought me my glass of milk — it ought to have been brought at 11 punctually, but it was nearer ten past. I had just finished the milk when Mr. Fanshaw came in from the chart room and spoke to me and then went into his room."

Thurtle decided not to raise the issue of the "double."

"What time was that?"

"It would have been — twelve to fifteen minutes past 11."

Near enough to the time when Marberry and the foreman of the window cleaners were giving their information to Boyce and himself, noted Thurtle.

"Check this, please, Miss Hackett. Between 10:30 and 11:15, you do not know for certain that Mr. Fanshaw was in the chart room — the whole of that time? You only *infer* that he must have been there?"

"If you wish to split hairs, it's possible that he might have gone up to see Mr. Marberry for a few minutes — they're putting pressure on the landlord — but it's extremely unlikely, as we are working against time. Anyhow, I know he didn't leave the building —"

"How do you know that?"

"Because he never goes out without his overcoat after the first of October" — again the indulgent smile — "and his overcoat was hanging up, as it is at this moment."

She got up and opened the communicating door. Thurtle followed her and contemplated the steely gray overcoat surmounted by the broad-brimmed Homburg.

"He always hangs it there, Miss Hackett? But you don't notice it *every* time you come into the room?"

"I do not," agreed Miss Hackett. "But on this occasion I did — I had to." She told him how she had first put the postcards on the desk. "Then I thought they would be safer in his pocket. So I put them there." She thrust her hand into the breast pocket of the overcoat. "And here they are."

That was conclusive. Thwaites had stated that the murderer was wearing a gray overcoat and wide-brimmed Homburg. And the taximan, Marberry, and the foreman of the window cleaners had said the same.

For the first time in his official life, Thurtle caught himself trying to shirk a fact because it menaced a theory. It would be absurd to believe that Miss Hackett was lying — making herself an accessory. And Miss Hackett was proving that Julian Fanshaw

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could not have been the murderer seen by Thwaites and the others — in short, that the "double" existed, and the "double" had killed Ernest Fanshaw.

There was still one loophole — in the possibility that Fanshaw was using a duplicate coat and hat. In which case he must have hidden the duplicates in the building.

He was staring at the postcards which Miss Hackett had handed him. As the sense of shock weakened, he studied the notes on the postcards, then returned them to Miss Hackett, who put them back in the pocket of the overcoat.

Before leaving the room Thurtle lifted the coat from its peg, looked it over, back and front, and replaced it. He did the same with the Homburg, studying the inside, noting that there was no mark of ownership on the inner band. Next, his eye rested on the tall metal cupboard, near the window.

"What do you keep in this cupboard?"

"Any special documents to be protected from fire, but it's been out of use for the last three months. If you want to look inside, I'll have to ask Mr. Fanshaw for the key — oh! — it's not locked — it's not even properly shut!"

She opened the door, revealing an empty interior. If the "double" existed, that cupboard would have been large enough to hide him. And so would the similar cupboards in the chart room.

While explaining Julian's routine and recent movements, Miss Hackett made use of the diary.

"I see, Miss Hackett, that Mr. Fanshaw went to Manchester on the fifth and stayed overnight. To meet a client, I suppose?"

"I don't know if it was a definite client. He may have gone with the general idea of seeking new business. He gave me no details."

Thurtle thanked Miss Hackett, then went back to the chart room — in search of a duplicate coat and hat.

"I'd like to have a look round, Mr. Fanshaw, especially in those cupboards."

"Go ahead," said Julian, without looking up. "Nothing is locked."

The first cupboard was little more than a nest of deep metal drawers, of which three were empty and two contained account books. The second cupboard was grooved for shelves, but all the shelves had been taken out. It could have concealed an overcoat — or a man, for that matter — but it was empty. The drawers of the filing cabinet were too small even for the hat — as were the drawers in the long map-strewn table.

Downstairs Thurtle found Sergeant Boyce in the hall. Two men were guarding the doors. Thurtle spoke to Boyce.

"Gray overcoat and broad-brimmed Homburg. See that they don't leave the building on anybody or are carried away by anybody. Examine all outgoing bags and parcels big enough to contain either or both."

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Thurtle left the building and walked round the corner to the late Ernest Fanshaw's office, where he received a detailed report from Rouse, the subordinate inspector in charge.

He was shown the copy of the *Times* which had been brought in by the murderer and used in the murder. Rouse turned to the page — unstained — which is allotted to small advertisements. Near the centre of one column, about two inches had been somewhat clumsily cut out.

"Thought you'd like to have a look at this, sir — I've never seen a cluer clue, myself!" chuckled Rouse. "Jagged edge and all — so when we find the missing bit we can fit it in and know we've found *the* missing bit."

"That sort of thing does happen sometimes." Thurtle grinned. "What's the missing bit about?"

"Just what you'd expect, when you come to think of it." Rouse produced a complete copy of the same edition and read aloud: " 'Legacies. Reversions. Missing relatives. Genealogies traced. Identification formalities executed. Write for appointment. Guardian Agency, 15, Tinbury, E.C. 2.' I've 'phoned the agency that we want a list of those answering this ad as soon as possible."

"Anything else?"

"Not a thing. The glove — you can buy 'em in any of the chain stores. The commando knife — thousands of 'em have been smuggled out of the Army as souvenirs. Tidiest job on record, I'd say."

In the early afternoon Inspector Thurtle returned to Julian Fanshaw's office. The guard in the hall reported all quiet. Julian Fanshaw had lunched in the office. On the landing, Thurtle came upon Sergeant Boyce, talking to a junior typist who had been in charge of the office while the staff were out at lunch.

Thurtle learned from the girl that she had taken the lunch tray to Mr. Fanshaw in the chart room. She had seen him again when he came through the typists' room, on the way to his own room. He had been carrying a metal drawer, apparently full of papers. It was a big drawer and she had opened the doors for him. There was no further information, except that the window cleaners had been at work most of the time.

In the office, Miss Hackett reported that Mrs. Fanshaw had come, following a telephone message, and was now with her husband in the chart room.

Thurtle, interviewing Elsa in Julian's room, was favorably impressed by the frankness of her answers about their home life.

"So your routine went on very much as usual, these last three months?" When Elsa agreed, he asked, "Was your husband absent from home on the night of the fifth of this month?"

The rather beautiful mouth was distorted in a sudden twitch. The answer was a long time coming.

"*Yes.*" It was a strained whisper, as if a damaging admission had been dragged from her. "But there's no

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reason why I should make a fuss about it — to a police officer." She took a grip of herself. "To the best of my belief, my husband spent that night at Manchester. On the other hand, some neighbors of ours — Mr. and Mrs. Brigstock — will tell you that they saw him dining with me at Blainley's Restaurant that night. For all I know, the Brigstocks — or somebody else — may have seen us going home in the car at about 1 in the morning. I tell you — I suppose I'd better keep saying 'to the best of my belief' — I tell you that it was *not* my husband! It was this murderer who took me out — and came home with me."

Thurtle was thunderstruck.

"Mrs. Fanshaw! A man spent all that time with you! And you failed to perceive that he was not your husband — until the following morning!"

She flushed, but she still gave the impression that she was telling the truth.

"You think a woman couldn't possibly make a mistake like that! I thought so, too — in a way, I still think so. I know that sounds like nonsense — oh, please try to look at it from my point of view, Inspector! Julian — that *is* the other man — came home in the middle of the afternoon. He said that the trip had been cancelled at the last moment —"

"One minute! With all this double stuff you'd been hearing about, weren't you suspicious?"

"Of course I was! I actually said 'How do I know you *are* Julian?' I forget how he answered — I forgot even that I had asked him. We had a jolly evening in Town."

Thurtle was convinced that she believed her own tale. He beamed like an uncle and encouraged her to give a detailed account of the evening, up to the return home. She added that she had telephoned Miss Hackett at 2 on the following afternoon.

"And when your husband came home that evening, he told you he had spent the previous night at Manchester?"

"No, he didn't. He referred to 'our' evening in Town. But I could tell he was pretending. He had met Brigstock on the train, and Brigstock had mentioned that he had seen 'us' at Blainley's. Julian guessed what had happened and wanted to save my face."

That was a nuisance, reflected Thurtle; if Julian had stuck to the Manchester story, it would have been easy to check.

"Let's get this clear, Mrs. Fanshaw. You had a suspicion the moment he turned up on Tuesday afternoon. He talked you out of that. But you must have become suspicious a second time, or you wouldn't have rung Miss Hackett."

"Quite true. At breakfast next morning I panicked. I challenged him with a question which only my husband could answer. He was evasive. And when I pressed him for an answer, he was deeply offended and walked out of the house."

"What started the panic?"

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"His overcoat, Inspector. When I came downstairs, his coat was in the hall. The sun was on it. And I thought it seemed very slightly different — like the coat I saw on the 'double' at Blainley's — though, even then, I wasn't sure." Her eyes turned to the coat hanging on the peg, beneath the Homburg. "If you'll look closely at my husband's coat, you'll see that the fabric —"

She stopped short, staring at the coat on the wall, her eyes wide with fear. "It was *that* coat!" The words came in a whisper. "That is the murderer's coat!"

"No need for alarm, Mrs. Fanshaw. I think you're mistaken, but we'll soon make sure. Don't touch it, please." Keeping one eye on Elsa, he opened the communicating door.

"Miss Hackett! Will you kindly ask Mr. Fanshaw to come here — and please come back with him yourself. And I'd be very grateful if you'd send someone to get Sergeant Boyce."

Elsa was sitting at the desk. She was leaning back in the swivel chair, her eyes closed. Thurtle thought she might have fainted, and he touched her wrist. She opened her eyes as Julian came in. They waited in silence until Miss Hackett arrived, with Boyce.

Thurtle turned to Julian.

"Mr. Fanshaw. This morning Miss Hackett made some notes for you on postcards. May I see the postcards, please?"

"Certainly." He moved toward the desk.

"I put them in the breast pocket of your overcoat," said Miss Hackett, annoyed because he had apparently forgotten.

"Then they'll still be there." Julian felt in the breast pocket of the overcoat. As he withdrew his hand, empty, he touched the cloth, fingered it, then peered at it.

"This is not my overcoat!"

"Right! Stand away from it, please."

The left side pocket bulged. Thurtle drew out a cleaning glove with a long cuff — fellow to the bloodstained glove found in the wastebasket in Ernest Fanshaw's office. From the folds of the glove a key fell to the floor. Thurtle picked it up with his handkerchief.

"Evidence, Inspector?" asked Julian.

"That's a left-hand glove. A right-hand glove, similar in every way, was found in your uncle's office, bloodstained."

Thurtle lifted the coat from its peg, turned it, revealing the bloodstain near the second button.

"Better look at the hat, too, Mr. Fanshaw."

"Not mine! This one has initials on the inside band. *J.F.* — standing presumably for 'Julian Fanshaw.' I had no initials in my hat."

Thurtle remembered that the hat he himself had taken from that peg had no initials. And that the overcoat had nothing in the side pockets, and no bloodstain.

"That's the murder coat, all right!" put in Boyce.

"Maybe. But there's a catch in

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it," said Thurtle. "It's not the coat and hat I examined in this room — hanging on that peg — in Miss Hackett's presence this morning."

"A catch in it!" Julian laughed. "You'll find the same catch in all your evidence, Inspector, until you admit you've made a fool of yourself in accusing me of faking my own double. To everyone else it will be obvious that he walked in here — as me — and planted that coat."

"It's horrible!" cried Elsa. "Things are creeping up behind us and strangling us. Julian, I told Inspector Thurtle that you were in Manchester that night and that the other man was with me."

"That just about puts the lid on!" Julian dropped into a chair, straddle-wise. "Inspector, my wife has been torturing herself with this nightmare until she has come to believe it. I was *not* in Manchester — I was with her."

"Miss Hackett!" boomed Thurtle over Elsa's protest. "Can you contribute anything?"

"I can only say that Mr. Fanshaw left the office with a suitcase at about 2:30 on the Tuesday afternoon and that he returned with the suitcase at about 3 on Wednesday."

"That doesn't prove that I went to Manchester. I changed my mind after leaving the office and put my suitcase in a cloakroom. I did so precisely because I was afraid my double might turn up and make love to Elsa."

Thurtle glanced at Elsa and received the impression that she believed Julian.

"And where did you happen to be, Mr. Fanshaw, between breakfast time and 3 o'clock on Wednesday?"

"Walking the streets of London in a state of advanced nervous depression, due to my wife's inability to tell me from another man — and in a general blue funk about this whole twin-brother-double business. Ask me if I met anybody. I didn't. I can't prove any of it. And I don't have to!"

To Elsa his outburst registered as a cry for help.

"I can help you prove you were with me — if you were, Julian. I told the Inspector everything we did. You've only to repeat it."

"I don't see how that will help," muttered Julian. "But here goes. We dined at Blainley's. Brigstock and his wife saw us."

"And after Blainley's, Julian?" Her eagerness revealed that she had changed ground and was ready to believe Julian had been with her in spite of everything, including the coat in the hall.

"After Blainley's we went to a show, but I can't remember which. Nothing sticks out in particular — there was the usual scramble to get out before the curtain calls, to make sure of the last train."

The last train! There came a low moan from Elsa. Julian did not even know that they had gone from the theatre to a night club — and then on home in the car, long after the last train.

Without a word to anyone she walked out of the room — out of the

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suite. Julian abandoned a half-hearted attempt to follow her. He ignored the others, absorbed in his own thoughts.

"If you don't want me for anything else, Inspector, I'll get back to the chart room," he said absently. "All these upsets are putting me behind in my work."

At 5, the various staffs began to leave. By half-past 6, Julian — still in the chart room wrestling with estimates — was the only office worker left in the building. Thurtle came in without knocking.

"We shan't be very long now," he announced. "There aren't many spots in this building where a man can hide himself."

"I don't think you'll find him," returned Julian indifferently. "He probably planted that coat in my room during lunch hour."

Thurtle found himself staring at the long table, still cluttered with wall maps, as it had been when he first saw it. Why should a man want to take a lot of maps from the wall and jumble them all up on the table?

"During lunch hour — yes!" said Thurtle. "But you planted the coat yourself. When you came into this room this morning from your uncle's office, you hid that coat and hat under those maps there on the table. During lunch hour you carried the coat and hat into the other room in one of those big metal drawers, covering the top with papers to prevent the girl seeing anything."

"You're letting this become an obsession, Thurtle. I thought you'd drop it after our little get-together with my wife — and the coat and the blood-stain and whatnot."

"*And* the visit to Manchester," said Thurtle. "Were you in Manchester that night?"

"No."

"Exactly! You tell us — truthfully — you were not in Manchester, because you know we could check. You tell your wife you were not in Manchester in such a way as to make her certain that you're lying. You worked up suspicion at home by dodging her test question. And this afternoon you *deliberately* fluffed — by leaving out that you went on to the Mignon night club and that you went home by your own car. Result: she's ready to swear that she was in the company of the double!"

Julian stared at Thurtle. "In short, everything I say and do is a fake — even if there's no evidence of a fake. You see what I mean by obsession? My dear fellow, talk it over with your sergeant! He'll tell you that the expert searching of this building is sheer footle. He'll tell you that my double planted the coat, removed mine, and then walked out of the building more or less disguised as a window cleaner."

Thurtle looked blank. He had forgotten those window cleaners.

Julian went on: "I don't suppose your men looked very closely at the window cleaners. Under your obsessional orders, they were concentrating on me."

Obsession! Thurtle admitted to

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himself that the word made him wince. He had certainly formed a theory early in the case — not that you could ever really string facts together without making a theory of some sort!

"If he got himself up as a window cleaner, what did he do with the coat and hat he took off your peg?"

"Obviously, he hid them. You'll almost certainly find them somewhere in this office. Now I come to think of it, there's a loose floorboard in my room — parallel with my desk and close to the back. It's been like that for years."

Some five minutes later, Julian was invited into his own room. Thurtle and Boyce stood by while one of the searchers raised the loose floorboard.

"What do you see, Mr. Fanshaw?"

"My overcoat and hat, by the look of it."

Thurtle bent down. There was a clearance of only about three inches between the floorboards and the reinforced concrete. The overcoat had been spread under the adjoining boards and the hat had been flattened. Thurtle coaxed the coat free and held it up.

"Is that your coat?"

"It appears to be. Try the pocket for those cards Miss Hackett put there."

Thurtle withdrew the cards and recognized them from his previous inspection. He laid the coat on a chair and retrieved the hat.

"I'm glad I was right!" chirped Julian.

Boyce and the searchers left the room.

"May I have my hat and coat — they aren't evidence of anything, are they?"

Thurtle felt in the other pockets, which were empty, then handed over the coat. Julian took a clothes brush from a drawer and applied it. Then he put on the coat and the hat.

"If I can't be of any further use to you, Inspector, I think I'll go home."

"I can't stop you."

"I gather the murderer has got clean away?"

Their eyes met. Thurtle could only see a man of iron nerve, stimulated by bravado — a man enjoying his own peril.

"Maybe he thinks he got clean away!"

"I have to remember that he will probably turn out to be my twin brother. All the same, I hope you catch him. But even if you don't, it won't prove that he doesn't exist. I mean — how *can* you prove that a man does *not* exist? Think it over, Inspector. Good night!"

The police obtained an adjournment of the inquest after formal evidence had been given. Two days after the funeral, Julian Fanshaw, as beneficiary under the reversion with an approximate value of £50,000, filed proof of his uncle's death. The Guardian Agency had received 34 answers to its advertisement in the *Times* and the police had checked the list without result.

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"Looks like a dead case, Thurtle," said the Assistant Commissioner — by which he meant that they had already obtained all the evidence that was obtainable. "This twin business! I confess I'm keeping an open mind. Like you, of course, I always disbelieve those yarns about identical twins. But some of the yarns are true. Anyhow, we'll send the papers in and see what happens."

The Director of Public Prosecutions sent the papers back — but he sent with them one of the brighter members of his staff, a man named Mawson, to soften the blow.

"We can't charge Fanshaw as a principal, because we can't prove that the twin — or double — has no existence. Equally, he could not be charged as accessory, principal unknown, because there is no evidence that the two men ever met or communicated with each other."

"Are you breaking it gently to us," asked the Assistant Commissioner, "that Fanshaw is going to get away with the murder?"

"That's my opinion — I'm not quoting anybody, mind! The strength of Fanshaw's position lies in the evidence his wife will give — that she let the other man spend the evening with her, believing him to be her husband."

"But Fanshaw himself denies it," objected Thurtle.

"Fanshaw denies it to you because you would check and prove he was not in Manchester. But at the trial, Fanshaw would obviously exercise his right to *keep out of the witness box*. His wife's evidence would therefore stand. Without some rebutting evidence — which you cannot produce — her evidence would establish the existence of the — call him the Twin. That, in turn, would strengthen the already strong alibi given by Miss Hackett."

Mawson bowed himself out, leaving the two officials in the dumps.

"The funny thing about these office lawyers, sir, is that after a few years of it they know a lot about the law and nothing about anything else, if you understand me."

"Got an idea, Thurtle?"

"You could hardly call it an idea, sir. I'm pretty sure the wife is playing straight — doesn't know she's being used. And I don't think she'll be very pleased when I tell her so."

He went down to Rubington after lunch, trying to work out a tactful approach. It was a distasteful job. He thought of Elsa as a featherhead, but a good little woman at heart who deserved a better man.

In the front garden of the Fanshaw's house was an agent's board, advertising a sale by auction.

"Mr. Thurtle!" She greeted him almost as an old friend. "Have you some good news?"

"Nothing much. I've come down on the chance of picking up something from you." He declined an offer of coffee and said it was too early for tea. "I see you're moving?"

"It's awful here," she admitted. "People don't exactly cut us outright.

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But they simply don't believe in the twin."

"You can't blame them," he said sympathetically. "You didn't altogether believe in him yourself after that first encounter at Blainley's. Did you?"

"I suppose I didn't, really. It's sort of too much to believe suddenly, isn't it!"

"But by the time of the Manchester incident you believed absolutely in a twin, didn't you?"

"Y-yes, I had to. But it was all loose ends. I didn't say 'because this, therefore that' — the way you do. I had proved to my own satisfaction that it was not Julian who took me out that night. A couple of days later I sort of stood a long way off and looked at the whole thing. It seemed then that I couldn't possibly have mistaken another man for Julian. I believed one thing — then I believed the opposite — then back again. It was muddled and silly, but that was how I felt. And I don't mind telling you now that I thought the police were cheating."

"Well, I'm jiggered! How did we manage to cheat?"

"I thought that you weren't really trying to find the twin, because, like the local superintendent, you didn't really believe in him. So after a day or two I went to a private detective."

"And he charged you a lot and told you nothing?"

"That's spiteful, Inspector," she smiled. "He only charged me three guineas and he refused to go on with the case after he had been to the hospital to inquire — where they made him believe that a mistake would have been impossible."

That gave Thurtle an inspiration — the first one he had in the entire case.

"Don't mind my feelings," he said. "You were disappointed with us. And then you went to one of those agencies that offer to trace missing relatives?"

"How did you know!"

"Hasn't anyone ever told you that your policemen are wonderful? I can even give you the name. The Guardian Agency, in Tinbury."

"I think that was the name. Only, you see, I didn't go. Nothing came of it because, before I had mailed the letter, Miss Hackett rang up telling me about Uncle Ernest. I knew then that you'd *have* to try and find him."

"I'd like to know what you said to the agency. It might give me a new angle."

"I didn't say much — the advertisement said to write for an appointment. Now that I think of it, I don't remember tearing up the letter."

She went to an escritoire. Thurtle held his breath while she opened a drawer and rummaged around. Then she looked under the blotter.

"Here it is. It's sealed but not stamped — I remember I didn't have a stamp."

She handed him the envelope. He took out the letter.

Dear Sir: In answer to the enclosed advertisement in today's Times —

Pinned to the notepaper was the advertisement, clumsily cut, with a jagged edge.

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"Are you sure you cut it from the *Times*, as you say in the letter?"

"It's delivered here every morning. I cut it out before Julian took it to the office."

Thurtle's sense of triumph was dampened by pity. There was still a nasty little bit of work to be done.

"I'm glad you happened to show me this, Mrs. Fanshaw." He took out his fountain pen. "It's evidence, among other things, that you believed in the twin and were trying to help the police to find him. I'd like to show it to my chief. Just sign your name on the advertisement, will you — write it so that your signature runs over onto the notepaper."

When she had signed, he gently waved the paper to dry the ink — reflecting that there was no longer any means by which he could soften the blow that must come to her. He chattered himself out of the house.

On arriving at the Yard, the Inspector was startled to learn that Mr. Fanshaw had asked to see him and was in the waiting room. Ten minutes later — after Thurtle had checked the advertisement with the copy from which it had been cut — Julian was being shown in.

"Good afternoon, Inspector!" Julian's face was flushed and the heartiness was self-conscious. "My wife rang me up to say you had seen her and that you were rather enthusiastic over a cutting from a newspaper. Can I be of any help?"

"You can," said Thurtle. "On the day your uncle was murdered, you left home carrying a copy of that day's *Times*. *Did you give that copy to your twin brother before 11 o'clock — so that he could use it while committing the murder?*"

Julian sighed. For a long moment he looked haggard, then he bucked back into heartiness.

"I guessed what had happened when she told me you'd made her sign the cutting. Odd thing, Inspector! I suddenly became terrified of Miss Hackett — thought I'd sneak round here and get it over with quietly. I'll sign a confession. But you've won on a fluke, you know."

"Fluke be damned!" cried Thurtle. "If you hadn't dragged your wife in as an unconscious accomplice — upset the poor girl's nerves by making her think you were in Manchester that night — she'd never have cut out that advertisement!"

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Black Mask Magazine . . .

TRIPLE CROSS

by JOHN D. MacDONALD

THE GIRL WAS YOUNG, WITH A DANCER'S body and a dress that clung expensively and just right. She was the hostess and knew everyone who stood around her. He stood over near the draperies drawn across the windows against the dusk, watching her drink heavily, hearing the dissonant tautness of her voice — and he thought how incredible it was that she had given up all the things she could have become in order to marry Gus Lench, in order to have this Westchester home. And, in this long room softly lighted, here in the mechanical babble of the cocktail party, she had become the assistant executioner.

He saw that murder did not become her. He saw that her mouth was too wide and too thick-shiny. The many drinks did nothing to glaze the faintly feral alertness of her eyes.

Of course, the others did not know, and thus did not feel the strain of it.

Most of the guests had come up from the city. Lawrence Hask stood near the draperies and took his eyes from Gail Lench for a moment to look around the room. Often he thought that these cocktail party guests had no reality, that they were rented for such affairs, wound up by a key inserted in the small of their backs. Men with gestures, and pouched eyes and deft conversation. Women who posed, holding one stance, then another, with sleepy words of idle warmth.

At the far end of the room a sallow man played muted and professional bop at a baby grand. A girl, her face putty overlaid with glaze, stood raptly behind him and foolishly massaged the nape of his lean neck as he played.

Hask replaced his empty glass on a tray, took a fresh drink. It seemed so obvious, the tension in the air, that he wondered that Carter didn't feel it. Halfway down the room August Lench sat on a couch with a puffy little blonde. She giggled too much. August Lench, at 60, carried 200 pounds on his five-foot-four frame. His naked skull was marked with discolored spots. He appeared to be the incarnation of evil, and this in itself was his greatest business advantage, people saying, "No man who looks like that could be as wicked as he looks."

But Hask knew that Lench was exactly what he seemed to be.

Carter, carefully marked for death, stood in the group near Gail. She favored him with her most animated

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moments, with the huskiest of her strained laughter. Lawrence saw Lench glance over from time to time, his eyes flicking across Carter's broad back, and Lawrence wondered that Carter, through the well-tailored suit, could not feel the icy cold of those casual glances from Lench's colorless little eyes.

The room was smoke, and rustle-hum of conversation. The room was the pale flower-stink of gin. The room was suggestion and counter-suggestion. And the room was death.

Lawrence Hask stood, tall and lean and detached, a half smile on his lips, a casual, cocktail party smile, and he caught the gesture when Gail self-consciously touched her hand to her dark hair.

She took three steps out into the room and said, "Everybody! Your attention! With this party the House of Lench inaugurates the all-weather pool. As it's a surprise and we knew you wouldn't come prepared, we've laid in a stock of the proper swimming pool attire, both male and female. Come along, now. The pool is in the new pavilion adjoining the house. Steam-heated, my dears. With bar. Men's dressing rooms on the left, women on the right."

Lawrence quickly drained his drink. This would very probably be it. He glanced over and saw Carter's bodyguard, Lochard, pull himself together with an effort. The tall redhead clung to his arm. Lawrence knew that she would not be in on it, that, under pressure, she would merely say that she had been told to be nice to Lochard.

The pool was surprisingly large, oval in shape, the water in it placid and green. The pavilion had paned glass walls, steamed with the thick heat. The chill glasses on the tiny bar were beaded with moisture.

Hask knew that it was in a style that Lench could well afford, and only Carter could more easily afford. With Carter out of the way, it would be that much easier for Lench to afford it, because then Lench would not only receive his own cut, he would get Carter's too. And that made a proper motive for murder. Lawrence guessed that Gail's few unprovable ad lib courtesies to Carter would figure very small in Lench's mind, if at all. Lench had arranged Carter's murder with care, and, in the mind of Lench, it would have the same importance as the purchase of a new gross of stitching machines to be planted in Brooklyn lofts to enlarge the daily issue of treasury pool tickets, thus enlarging Lench's personal cut.

As Lawrence Hask followed the other men into the dressing rooms, as he selected a garish pair of trunks in his waist size, he wondered what Gus Lench would say if he knew that Lawrence Hask not only knew about the impending murder, but planned to prevent it.

In a way, Lench's weakest point was his inability to think of any motive beyond profit. Given another few days, Lawrence could have ferreted out, from Gail, the precise method. But there hadn't been time.

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If Lench had thought of any motive except profit, he might have been a bit more wary on the day that the three route men had brought Hask, bleeding, to Lench's office.

The biggest one said, "Gus, we found this cutey peddling on our route."

Lench had frowned. "You look like somebody I knew once, friend. Who are you?"

"Larry Hask. West Coast. A big fix on a number broke my little combine out there, so I came here where it's soft."

"Soft, he thinks it is!" Lench had said in slow wonder.

"Soft is right," Lawrence had said. "You've got no penetration in your area. Stinking little candy stores and horse rooms and newsboys. Hell, you've got half a hundred big plants in your area. One out of every three foremen and sweepers and setup men ought to be peddling for you."

Lench had picked up Hask's crude pool tickets and had looked them over. "Amateur work," he had said. "Hand-stitched, mimeographed. How could you unload these?"

Lench had ducked when Larry reached for his inside pocket, but one of the route men said, "He's clean, Gus." Larry had thrown a pack of stubs onto the desk.

"You sold all these!" Lench said.

"Yes, and right in the middle of your area, friend."

Lench had put his fat white fingertips together. After a long pause he had said, "I can use you."

"So can a lot of other people. But I come high. Three hundred a week and expenses."

"You think a lot of yourself, eh?"

"So much that I don't like your pet poodles laying their fat little hands on me. That's the offer. Take it or I go in business for myself. And I import some talent for protection."

Lench had hedged for two days, and Lawrence knew that he was checking higher up. Approval had come through and Lawrence Hask went on the combine payroll at the figure he requested, under the very sedate title of promotion manager. And it had taken a full year. One full year of gently prodding Gus Lench, of telling him how smart he really was, of how unappreciated he was by the higher-ups.

Carter was the top man and Lench was one of the three main underlings. Carter, at Lench's party, looked as out of place as a banker at a crap game. Tall, heavy, he had a massive dignity.

Lench had asked plaintively, "Why are you all the time pushing me? Why should you want a bigger cut for me, Larry?"

"Bigger for you, bigger for me," Larry said.

And so the germ, once planted, had grown.

Two nights before, he had arranged the meeting with Gail. She had left Lench snoring at the city apartment, had stood on a corner with the spring wind whipping her long coat, standing where the street light touched her face.

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When he had parked on a quiet block in the Seventies, Gail had come into his arms, half moaning, half sobbing, "Why so long, Larry? Oh, why do you make us wait so long?"

"Gus is no dummy."

With her face at his throat, she ground her forehead hard against the line of his jaw. "Oh, how I hate him, Larry!"

He had the bottle in the glove compartment. She tilted it often. Each time, as before, he only pretended to drink, letting a slur creep into his speech.

She giggled emptily and said, "Oh, my Gus is going to be really big. Really the tops. It's all set for the cocktail party, Larry. Mr. High-n-mighty Carter is going out."

And then, with a sort of primitive caution, she refused to say any more, and he didn't dare pump her.

He dropped her near the apartment. After she had gone, quickly, swayingly, around the corner, he had mopped the lipstick from his mouth, had rolled down the window of the car and spat out onto the dark asphalt.

During the next two days Lench had acted much as usual, moaning because there were three $500 hits to be balanced against a $12,000 take on the first day, and gloating because, on the second day, there were no hits at all. The route men left their take at the drop-off points as usual, picking up the tickets for the following week.

Only once did Lench give Larry a slight clue that Gail had been talking the truth. He said, "How would you like a nice fat district of your own, kid? A new district with a lot of promise."

"Carter gives out the districts in this combine."

Lench had pawed at his loose chin. He had grinned. "Maybe he'll let me do that. You could make a G and a half a week instead of the peanuts you're getting."

"When you can give it to me, Gus, I'll take it."

"Having a cocktail party tonight, kid. Out at the Westchester house. You know where it is. Come around about five, hey?"

"Thanks." That solved a problem. It saved having to angle for the invitation.

Lawrence came out in the trunks onto the apron of the pool before Carter left the dressing room. The water was almost unpleasantly tepid. He came up from the long dive, shook the water out of his eyes, thrust strongly for the far edge of the pool.

Gail sat on the edge in a brief white two-piece suit. Her feet were in the water. In spite of the heat her smooth shoulders were pimpled with chill, and she hugged herself.

He looked up at her from the water and said, "All set?"

"For what, Larry? For what?" she asked in a flat empty tone.

He pushed off and floated on his back, looking up at the night sky through the overhead glass. When he rolled on his side he saw Lench walk out of the dressing room. Lench

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looked as though he were made of white wax, as though he were a clumsy Buddha that had begun to melt and then had cooled again in the moment of melting.

Lochard did not swim. He stood, sweating in the steamy heat. The redhead had changed to a golden suit. She clung to his arm and giggled.

Lawrence saw the color of the man's face and knew that the heat had got to the drinks and that he would soon be ill. Carter walked out with dignity and made a fairly respectable dive into the pool. The pool began to fill up, the green water dancing, smooth limbs flashing, soft music coming from the loudspeaker over the bar. No, it would not be long now. But how were they going to do it? It had to be almost foolproof. If murder were suspected, retaliation was likely to be quick and severe.

Lawrence kept his eyes moving. He saw Lench pad wetly toward the light switches. He looked quickly for Carter. Carter was coming down the far side of the pool. Lawrence launched himself toward Carter just as the lights went out.

The air was filled with shrill screams and hoarse laughter. Closer at hand Lawrence heard a gasp of surprise, then a grunt of alarm and the beginning of a yell for help, smothered by the water before it could attract attention.

He hadn't counted on the lights being out. In sudden fear he made a surface dive, reaching out under the water. He could find nothing. He went up, gulped air, went down again. His fingers lightly brushed smooth flesh, but his wind was almost gone. The third time he went down, his hand tangled in long hair.

He pulled as hard as he could, struggled to the surface. When he broke into the dark air, a hand splatted against his face and teeth sunk into his arm. He smashed his fist out into the darkness, missed completely. And then she was gone; he had sensed that it was a woman.

He then did what he should have done before. He made the side of the pool, hauled himself out, and ran for the light switches.

There was a chorus of disappointment as the lights went on, as people moved hastily away from each other.

He said loudly, "I thought I heard Carter call for help."

"Where is he?" Lochard bellowed. "Where's the boss?"

Lawrence did not miss Lench's look of venomous fury. Water stung the tooth marks in his arm.

He walked to the side of the pool, poised, dived deep, keeping his eyes open. Near the tile bottom of the pool Carter floated, his gray hair drifting silkily in the water, his face composed, his eyes half open.

Larry grabbed the drowned man's wrist, got his feet against the bottom, pushed up with all his strength. When he emerged with Carter there were people to help. They got Carter onto the concrete apron of the pool, on his stomach. Larry went into the rhythmic cadence of life-saving technique.

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Lochard stood by, dancing with anxiety. All the others were clustered about. Larry dipped and pressed hard; when he sat back on his heels giving Carter's lax lungs a chance to fill, he saw Gail on one knee beside him, her face a white mask, her hands clenched. Her eyes were as venomous as Lench's.

The group stood, sober now, numb, waiting and hoping. When Carter coughed and then sighed, something like a faint cheer went up.

Water gouted from Carter's lungs and finally, white and shaking, he was well enough to sit up.

Lench said, "What happened? I thought you could swim good. What happened?"

Carter looked steadily at him. "I must have got a bit tired." He looked around. "Who got me out?"

Lawrence Hask was pointed out to him. Carter looked soberly at Hask. "You work for Lench."

"One of my best," Lench said.

"Help me up," Carter said to Lochard. Carter staggered for a moment, then walked toward the dressing room, leaning heavily on Lochard. He beckoned to Larry. Larry shrugged and followed him.

Once inside the dressing room Carter pulled away from Lochard. He braced himself, doubled his fist and hit Lochard in the mouth with all his strength. Lochard stumbled back against the wall, slipped, caught his balance, and stood up. He wiped the blood on his handkerchief.

"Dress," he said to Larry. "You're leaving with us."

"I work for Lench."

"You used to work for Lench. He is out of business. He'll find out tomorrow."

Larry shrugged. "Okay, so I come with you."

Minutes later the three of them went out to the pool. Lench, sitting on the edge beside Gail, struggled up, smiled wanly and said, "We're having steak pretty soon, boss."

Carter said evenly, "I'm sure you can eat my share. Thank you for an instructive party."

"Accidents will happen," Lench said.

"Yes, they sometimes will," Carter said in a dry voice. "Good night."

But Lench, his wet white body dripping water onto the heavy rug, caught them at the front door.

He said thickly, "Take your choice, Carter."

"Is there a choice?"

"It can work both ways, Carter."

"You wouldn't be warning me, Gus, would you?" Carter asked.

"People get too big for their pants, Carter," Lench said. "They lose touch. They don't know how many people they have left in the organization."

Carter leaned against the wall. "Since you force my hand, Mr. Lench, I'll put it this way. You, my greedy friend, may live another twelve hours, or even as much as thirty-six hours if you stay and fight it out. If you run like a rabbit, it may take my people a year to find you. If you want another year — run."

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Something inside seemed to collapse. He looked vaguely around the hall, as though weighing his possessions. He said in a smaller voice, "It isn't smart, Carter. These wars. They hurt business. Compromise —"

"No war, Lench." Carter stared meaningfully at Lench's sagging abdomen. "Just a little more worm food."

He opened the door. Before Lawrence left he had a fraction of a second in which to wink at Lench. He saw the little gesture light a fire of hope in Lench. Then Lawrence followed Carter out to the black sedan beside which the driver stood patiently waiting.

Lochard sat in front with the driver. Carter rode in silence for a few moments. Then he said, "That girl he married. Dancer, wasn't she?"

"Swimmer first. But the work was too hard. She picked Lench."

"She amused me at first, but she has no conversation. A bit humiliating to be drowned by a woman."

Lawrence saw then how they had worked it. He said, "How did you know?"

"Perfume. She put her arms around my neck from behind and dragged me down. She drenches herself in perfume, or hadn't you noticed. Has it in her hair."

"I've noticed," Lawrence said.

Carter maintained himself in two adjoining suites in a midtown apartment hotel. He ordered hot rum for himself, scotch and water for Hask.

He set the rum on his desk blotter, screened the wall safe with his big body as he opened it. He took out bills, a sheaf of them, turned and counted them out on the corner of the desk.

"For you, Hask. Five thousand. Part of that is for using your head. The rest is for giving me all you know about Lench's routine, his habits, and his people. This may become very messy. It will hurt business. It will attract unfavorable attention to our business affairs.

"Our tame politicians and the police on our payroll will have to show signs of activity. Route men will be picked up and fined. Newspapers will sprout scare headlines. Police will smash the stitching machines. Then a master headline will say *NUMBERS RING SMASHED*. After that we can go back to work. I know. I've seen it before."

Lawrence picked up the money, folded it once, and put it in his bill clip.

He said, "Lench is all set to go on his own. He's been relocating the printers and stitchers and he's been making new friends. He wangled gun permits for most of his route men and he has a big trouble fund to pay them heavy to stay with him. He has sleeping quarters at his office, and he won't stick his head out into fresh air until you're cooked. I'll write you out every pertinent address."

"Wait until I order dinner sent up. Tomorrow I'll change the master ticket design. I'm always prepared to do that. I'll send boys around to tell

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all the customers that the combine isn't honoring any old tickets sold starting tomorrow. That'll cut into his sales badly."

"But how will you get Lench himself?"

Carter shrugged. "The same way as always. Buy somebody close to him and guarantee their way out of the country. A nice chance for someone to retire."

"Not this time," Hask said slowly.

"What do you mean by that?"

"He has his defenses laid out so that nobody will get close enough. He knows your methods. He has one of those jailhouse items where it will ring a bell if you try to go into his office with a gun. He'll only have one man in his office at a time. He controls the door lock from his desk. And he keeps a gun in his hand until this trouble is over. He told me his plans once."

"What would you suggest, young man?"

"I winked at him as we left. He thinks I have something under my hat. Money will bring him out. He doesn't trust anybody except himself with money. So I case your layout, get your safe combination. If I do it right, I can go back to him in secret, explain that I'm living here now, clear him and some of his harder boys through downstairs. You'll have to be out. He'll open the safe himself."

"So what?"

"Set gun. Your safe sits fairly low. Rig a double barrel in there and it ought to catch him at throat level. So a man gets killed robbing your apartment. You're having dinner at a club when it happens."

Carter said, "Hask, you have a great talent for this business."

"Thank you, sir."

Lawrence Hask sat slouched in the chair across the desk from Lench. His throat was tight and his lips were dry, but he tried to look amused. Lench sat behind the desk, the heavy revolver aimed directly at Larry's face, Lench's finger on the trigger. "Why should I believe anything you say? You crossed me!"

"You just think I crossed you, Gus. I'm working for myself, and my best bet is through you. I thought you were smarter than Carter, but that thing you tried to pull at your pool is tops for stupidity in my book."

"Swimming accident? The cops would swallow it."

"They might. But Carter kicking off at your place would be just a little too rich for the blood of some of his people. They know he can swim. Beside, that dopey little wife you bought last year marked his throat with her fingernails. And he recognized her perfume. Sure, she can swim. But she had a little panic all her own. My way is better."

Lench said uncertainly, "Your way?"

"I'm living there now, at Carter's invitation. He sent me down here to cross you up. I'm supposed to pretend to play along with you and suck you into a trap. He has at least

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three hundred thousand in that wall safe of his. I got a peek at it. Nice dirty old hundreds and five hundreds. Nothing too big so it has to be discounted. I am supposed to tell you that next Friday night Carter will be going out for a big evening. I'll say I'm going out, but I won't go. I'll stay in the hotel and sap the two he leaves there at all times. I can do that easily enough.

"Then I am supposed to tell you that 11 o'clock is a good time. Bring a few boys and call up from the desk and I'll clear you with the desk. I give you a fake safe combination. When you arrive there's a reception party and you all get gunned for trying to rob the apartment."

Lench swallowed hard. He said, "Thanks, Larry. Thanks for telling me. But have you got a plan?"

"Carter is going out, but he's coming back at 10:30 with a few extra boys. So you come at 10. You can be waiting. And instead of giving you the fake combination, I'll give you the McCoy. For twenty-five per cent."

"Ten," Lench said.

"Isn't this a good time not to argue, Gus?"

"Okay. Ten o'clock on Friday night. A quarter cut for you. And I leave fast and leave a hoppie to blast Carter."

"Or do it yourself to make sure it's done."

Carter, standing near the bedroom windows, said, "I've moved the money to a box and the set gun is rigged, all but the trigger string. Did he believe you?"

"Of course. I told him you were fixing the frame for midnight, so he's coming at 11. That'll give you plenty of time to clear out."

"If the set gun kills Lench, Hask, what will his men do to you?"

"I'll tell Lench that I'd better watch the hall. When I hear the set gun go off, I'll run for it. I'll have a good chance."

"I often wonder about you, Hask. You have a — an educated way of speaking."

"Is that important?"

"No. No, I guess it isn't. Who do you think Lench will bring with him?"

"Hoagie Chance, Shank, Ullister, and probably Murph. They all have legal permits and they're the least likely to cross him."

"And Lench will open the safe himself?"

"You should have seen his eyes when I mentioned the money. Like a kid with his nose flat against the toyland window."

"Day after tomorrow is Friday. I'll clear out by 10:30, leaving you here, with Lochard and Mains on the floor, apparently sapped, as window dressing."

"That ought to do it," Hask said, keeping his voice calm.

Lawrence Hask sat slouched in the armchair, a drink in his hand. He tried to keep from looking at the

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clock. It was five to 10. Carter was dressing. Lochard and Mains were playing an aimless gin game at the big table. Heckle and Donovan, the two men Carter was taking with him, were in the next room watching television.

Every time Larry took a deep breath, his throat seemed to knot. Small tremors ran up and down his spine. A year and a month.

The phone was at his elbow. Carter came out of his bedroom just as the phone rang. Larry took it.

He listened, said, "Just a moment, please." He made his eyes wide, cupped his hand over the mouth piece, said, "Lench and four men. He's trying to cross me by coming early."

Carter frowned. He jerked a thumb at Lochard who went in and got the other two men away from the television program.

Carter said heavily, "Okay, we'll play it his way. On your face over there, Lochard. Remember, you're knocked out. Mains, you drop in that doorway there. Make it look good. Clear them to come up, Hask. Heckle and Donovan, you come into the bedroom with me."

Hask spoke briefly into the phone and hung up. He went to the bedroom door and said, "He's no dummy. Better shut the door completely."

Lochard lay still. Larry went over to him, slipping the sap from his hip pocket. He said, "Turn your head just a little this way, Lochard."

The sap, leather-wrapped, made very little sound as it thudded behind Lochard's ear. He made a small sighing sound. Hask crossed the room quickly and struck Mains. Mains began to struggle weakly. He hit him again, with careful precision.

Moments later there was a knock at the door. Hask opened it. Hoagie Chance came in fast, ramming a revolver muzzle with such force against Hask's middle that it knocked the wind out of him.

"Against the wall, friend," Hoagie said. He moved to one side of the door. Murph came next, took his station on the other side of the door. Then Lench came in, his face pallid with strain, a cigar in one hand, flat automatic in the other. The automatic had a long, tubular silencer screwed to the barrel.

Lench bent and held the glowing end of his cigar near the back of Lochard's hand. Lochard didn't stir.

"Good boy," Lench said to Hask. "Our friend is out?"

This was when it had to be. Hask jerked his thumb several times toward the bedroom door and said, "Left some time ago, Gus."

Gus said loudly, "We'll see about that safe." He motioned to Murph and Chance. They moved, up on their toes, toward the bedroom door.

Chance put out a gloved hand, closed it gently over the bedroom doorknob, then gave a sudden twist, opening the door, slamming it back with his foot as he went in.

The double slam of the shot sounded as Chance went in. He didn't falter in

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his rush, merely leaned farther and farther off balance, landing on his face, skidding on the bedroom rug. Shank and Ullister had come in from the hall, closing the door behind them. Shank carried a .45 Colt, Army model. When Heckle appeared inside the room, standing near the body of Chance, Shank fired once. The heavy slug doubled Heckle, dropped him back across Chance's body.

Carter moved quickly into the doorway, aiming carefully at Lawrence Hask, his face calm, his hand steady and deliberate. Ullister, Shank and Murph fired almost as one man. The slug from Carter's gun entered the wall an inch from Hask's left ear. The powdered plaster stung his cheek and neck. As Carter fell to his knees, driven back by the impact, he fired wildly. Murph had been standing sideways. The slug tore through him. He moved two weak steps to one side, lowered himself delicately to the rug, and was still.

Donovan appeared beyond Carter's body, his hands held high, saying hoarsely, "Okay, okay. Enough."

Lench's automatic made a small sound, no louder than a book dropped flat on a rug. Donovan's hands sagged. The dark hole had appeared just beside the left nostril. He stood for a moment, then fell heavily.

Lench, his fat lip lifted away from his teeth, stepped to Lochard, aimed and fired. Lochard's head moved slightly with the impact. He walked lightly over to Mains, fired again.

"Don't move!" Lench said to Hask. He went to the safe, spun the dial, his thick, gloved hands trembling. He missed, tried again. Hask heard the tumblers click. He closed his eyes. The blast seemed almost to lift the ceiling of the room. Lench's pudgy doll-body lay on its back in front of the safe.

Ullister stepped around the body, glanced into the safe. "Time to move," he said to Shank.

Shank yanked the door open and they raced into the hall. Other doors had opened and people peered out fearfully.

Hask counted slowly to five, ran into the hall and yelled, "Stop those men!"

The fire door was slowly closing behind the two. He heard their feet on the stairs. He raced to the fire door, hauled it open, pulled it shut, went quickly up two flights. The little wedge of wood still held the tenth-floor fire door open.

He pocketed the wedge, walked down to the bend in the corridor. The service elevator operator looked at him with frightened eyes. "Mister, I heard shots coming up the shaft. I don't like this."

Hask tried a calm smile. "Do I look like a killer?"

"Mister, you run around with those smart money boys on eight. I'm stopping with you at the main lobby."

Hask held the bill where the man could see the denomination. "Suit yourself, friend," Larry said casually.

"Mister, you go right to the basement." The man grinned nervously.

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Hask walked four blocks, took a subway downtown, phoned her from a drug store, met her twenty minutes later in a cheap restaurant.

In the harsh light she looked older.

Her voice masked by the noise in the restaurant, she said, "Why did you save him? Why did you? It was a deal. Gus was going to give me my freedom if it went through."

"You have your freedom, baby. Gus is dead."

He watched the slow wave of shock, then the deadly satisfaction.

"And thanks for helping me make sure that you got it," he said.

"Larry," she said. "You and I, we . . ."

He stood up slowly, put coffee money on the table. He said, with enormous weariness in his voice, "My name isn't Larry and there never was any 'you and I'."

Ray Logan lay in the hot bright sun of the beach at Acapulco. Sally was beside him.

"Darn it, Ray!" she said. "What made you think I'd wait for a year?"

"You waited, didn't you?" he asked, teasingly.

"But not patiently. And I was so afraid, darling, that you were going to New York to do something foolish about that kid brother of yours."

He shut his eyes against the sun and it shone red through his eyelids. He said sleepily, "Roger inherited all the craziness in the family. He wanted big thrills and so he started that stupid little numbers racket in New York. The trouble was, the opposition didn't know he was doing it as a sort of game and that he was going to fold it up after six months and write a book about it.

"Yes, Sally, I did go to New York and I found out which organization had removed Roger. It was a big organization. I haunted the police and the District Attorney's office, and finally they admitted that they not only didn't have enough evidence to go on, but they had no chance of getting the evidence.

"The big guns of the group were a man named Carter and a man named Lench. I fooled around for a long time, wondering what to do, and then suddenly I didn't have to do anything at all."

"Why, darling?"

He rolled over to look at her.

"Oh, Mr. Lench got annoyed at Mr. Carter, or the reverse, and they settled their argument by shooting each other and various other people who worked with them."

Later they swam together in the warm and restless sea, and he wondered if the hot sun would bake away the memories, or if the blue sea would wash them away — and yet he knew that fragments of that year would be always with him, and that no man can take vengeance in his own hands without staining some secret place in his heart . . .

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Eden Phillpotts once wrote about himself: "I do very little except write. . . . My garden and an occasional change of air are all I need. . . . My work has been the consolation and support of a difficult life, and I love it, and cannot think of existence away from it." Thus spoke the true writer who has produced more than 150 published books.

Mr. Phillpotts's best work is acknowledged to be his series of novels about Dartmoor, which have often been favorably compared with Thomas Hardy's novels about Wessex. But perhaps Mr. Phillpotts is better known among American readers for his many mystery and detective novels, of which THE GREY ROOM *and* THE RED REDMAYNES *are generally considered his finest efforts.*

Like many professional male writers — if not, indeed, most of them! — Eden Phillpotts could not resist recalling memories of his boyhood. He wrote a series of stories about a curious organism he called "The Human Boy," based no doubt on his own and his chums' experiences 'way back in "the golden age" of "dream days." These tales give an amusing picture of a British boys' school. In "Peters, Detective" the picture is much wider in scope; for in young Vincent Peters you will meet a regular little Baker Street Irregular, and in his adventures revolving about Mathers's lost half-crown, a murdered guinea pig, and a missing pencil sharpener you will be regaled with one of the shrewdest studies of Sherlock Holmes's methods ever perpetrated outside the Sacred Canon itself.

PETERS, DETECTIVE

by EDEN PHILLPOTTS

BEING FROM THE FIRST THE CHUM and friend of Peters, I can tell about his curious ways better than anybody. In fact, we shared our pocket money, which is always a great sign of friendship; and it was understood that if ever I get into trouble when I grow up, and am accused of murder or forgery, or anything like that, which does often happen to the most innocent people, Peters is going to give up anything he may be doing at the time, and devote his life to proving me not guilty.

I remember well the day he came. I was in the big schoolroom at the fire, roasting chestnuts and talking

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to Gideon; and Westcliffe and Fowle were also there. The Doctor came in with a new boy and said:

"Ah! There are some of the fellows by the fire, Peters."

Then he called out to Westcliffe and me and said:

"Westcliffe and Maydew, this is Peters. Make him welcome, and if there are chestnuts going, as I suspect, share them with him."

Then the Doctor went off to have some final jaw with the mother of Peters; and Peters came down the room and said, "Good evening!" in a very civil and quiet tone of voice.

He was thin and dark, and when he warmed his hands at the fire, it was easy to see the light through them. He also had a pin in his tie in the shape of a human skull, about as big as a filbert nut, with imitation ruby eyes.

We asked him who he was, and he said he came from Surrey, and that his father had been a soldier, but was unfortunately dead. His name was Vincent Peters.

Then Westcliffe, who is a silly ass, and only in the lower fifth, though quite old, asked Peters the footling question he always asks every new boy.

He said: "Would you rather be a greater fool than you look, or look a greater fool than you are?"

Of course, whatever you answer, you must be scored off. But young Peters seemed to know it. Anyway, instead of answering the question, he asked another. He said:

"Would you rather be uglier than you look, or look uglier than you are?"

Gideon was interested at this, because it showed at once Peters must be a cool hand.

"What are you going to be?" Gideon asked; and then came out the startling fact that Peters hoped to be a detective of crime.

"If you go detecting anything here, you'll get your head punched," said Westcliffe.

"I may or I may not," answered Peters. "But it's rather useful sometimes to have a chap in a school who has made a study of detecting things."

"You can begin tonight, if you like," I said, "because Johnson major's bat was found to have seven tacks hammered into it last week, when he took it out of the case to give it a drop more oil; and if you find out who did that, I've no doubt that Johnson major will be a good friend to you — him being in the sixth and captain of the first eleven at cricket."

"I don't know enough about things yet," answered Peters. "Besides, you have to be sure of your ground. In detecting, you may make friends, or you may not; but you will make enemies, to a dead certainty. In fact, that's the drawback to detecting. Look at Sherlock Holmes."

"That's only a yarn," said Gideon.

But Peters wouldn't allow this. He evidently felt very deeply about Sherlock Holmes.

"He is founded on fact — in fact,

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founded on thousands of solemn facts," said Peters. "The things he does are all founded on real crimes, and if anybody is going to be a detective, he can't do better than try to be like Sherlock Holmes in every possible way."

The tea-bell rang about this time, and Peters sat next to me and told me a good deal more. He said he was very thankful that he was thin, like Holmes, and wiry, and had a beak-like nose. He asked me if he had piercing eyes; and I could honestly say that they were pretty piercing. Then he brought out a picture of Sherlock Holmes, which he always carried, and showed me that, with luck, when he grew up, he ought really to be very much indeed like the great Holmes.

He was learning to play the violin also — not because he liked it, but because of the importance of doing it in moments of terrible difficulty. He said that it soothes the brain and helps it to do its work — but not so much while you're learning. He said that after he had thoroughly mastered one of the favorite pieces of Holmes's, he should be satisfied, as there would never be any occasion for him to play more than one piece.

Chaps liked Peters very fairly well. He was a good "footer" player, and very good at outside right. He was fast, and told me that speed often made all the difference to the success of a criminal case. Pure sprinting had many a time made all the difference to Holmes. Peters didn't know much in the way of learning, but he dearly liked to get hold of a newspaper and read the crimes. He didn't find out about Johnson major's bat, however; but he said it wasn't a fair test, because he never heard clearly all that went before the crime. A few small detections he made with great ease, and found the half-crown that Mathers had lost in the playground. This he did by cross-questioning Mathers, and making him bring back to his mind the smallest details; and then Mathers remembered turning head over heels while only touching the ground with one hand, to show how it could be done. And on the exact spot, in some long grass at the top of the playground where he had performed this feat, there was the half-crown. Mathers offered Peters sixpence on the spot, but Peters said it was nothing, and wouldn't take any reward.

He generally knew by the mud on your boots which of the walks you had been on, and he always could tell which of the masters was taking "prep" before he went into the room, by the sounds or silence. He also had a very curious way of prophesying by certain signs if the Doctor was in a good temper or a bad one. He always knew this long before anybody else, and it was a very useful thing to know, naturally.

But Peters did not really do much till his own guinea pig was found dead in its lair, about halfway through his second term at Merivale. He did not care for animals in a general

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way, excepting as they helped to throw light on crime; which, it seems, they are very much in the habit of doing, though not intentionally. But this particular guinea pig was far from a common creature, being a prize Angora, and having been given to Peters during the Christmas holidays by a friend of his dead father. It had long hair, and looked far more like one of those whacking chrysanthemums you see than a guinea pig. It was black and yellow, and had a round nose like a rabbit, and seemed so trusting and friendly that everybody liked it. One other boy — namely, James — had a guinea pig also, because these were the days before we took to keeping lizards and other things in our desks — which was discovered by a dormouse of mine coming up through the inkpot hole in my desk under the Doctor's nose, and so giving itself away. And though James's pig was a good white one, with a black patch on his right side and one little dab of yellow fur where his tail would have been if he had had one, yet, compared to Peters's guinea pig, he was nothing. James, however, didn't mind the loss of admiration for his pig, and he offered Peters to let the pigs live together, which would be better for both of them, because a guinea pig is the most sociable thing in Nature, and is known to pine, and even die, if kept in single captivity. But Peters had a secret fear that James's pig was not sound in its health. He told me that he had made a most searching examination of James's pig, and discovered a spot of pink skin on its chest. He said it might be nothing, but, on the other hand, it might be some infectious disease. Also, James's pig was inclined to go bald; so he thanked James very much, and said he thought that if the pigs saw each other through the bars from time to time, it would be all they wanted to brace them up and cheer them. But he thought, upon the whole, they had better not meet.

James didn't like this. He was rather a rum chap in many ways, but very good at grammar and chemistry; and he had invented a way of cribbing, while a master was actually in the room, that many copied afterwards. James got rather rude about Peters's guinea pig, and seemed to think in some way that it was the pig, and not Peters, that had decided not to live with his pig.

He said one day, when looking at the champion pig: "I suppose the little beast thinks it's too big a swell to live with my honest, short-haired pig. All the same, if they had a fight, I know which would jolly well win."

"So do I," said Peters. "If a race horse had a fight with a cart horse, the cart horse would win. This is not a prizefighting pig."

Bray was there and said the same. He, of course, understood all about prizefighting, owing to his brother being runner-up in the "middle-weights" at the amateur champion-

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ship of the Army; and he said that if these pigs fought, the superior weight of James's pig behind the shoulder would soon settle it. Besides, of course, the other one's hair streamed all over it like a Skye terrier's. You could see at a glance that it was never born to be a fighter.

"However, if you want a fight," said Peters, who was always cool and polite, owing to copying Sherlock Holmes, "if you want a fight, James, I can oblige you."

They were both fourteen and a half, and James was a lot fatter, but not so tall as Peters.

"No," said James, "I don't want to fight. I didn't mean anything of the sort."

"I may be able to get you a guinea pig like mine next holidays," said Peters. "If I can, I will."

"I don't want it," said James. "I don't care about these guinea pigs that look like penwipers gone mad. I'd rather have mine."

This, of course, was mean and paltry jealousy, and we rotted James till we rather got his wool off.

A week afterwards the champion pig was found dead on its back, with its paws in the air and its eyes open. They had a look of fright in them; and it was very interesting indeed, this happening to Peters, because it would be sure to show if his detective powers were really worth talking about.

Of course everybody said it must be James, and James said, and also swore, that it was not.

Peters told me privately that he was trying to keep a perfectly open mind. He said there were many difficulties in his way, because in the event of a human being dying, you always have a post-mortem, followed by an inquest; whereas, with a mere guinea pig, belonging to a boy in a school, there is not enough publicity. He said that up to a certain point publicity is good, and beyond that point it is bad. Sherlock Holmes always set his face against publicity until he'd found out the secret. Then he liked everybody to know it, though often not until the last paragraph of the story. That showed his frightful cleverness.

I said: "I suppose you will ask yourself: 'What would Holmes do if one evening, while he was sitting improving Watson, there suddenly appeared before him a boy with a dead guinea pig?' "

And Peters said: "No. Because a guinea pig in itself would not be enough to set the great brain of Holmes working. If there were several mysterious murders about, or if some dark and deadly thing had occurred, and Holmes, on taking the pig into his hand and looking at it through his magnifying glass, suddenly discovered on the pig some astounding clue to another fearful crime, then he would bring his great brain to work upon the pig; but merely as a guinea pig suddenly found dead, it would not interest him. In my case it's different. The pig was a good deal to me; and this death will get round to the man

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who gave me the creature, and he'll be sure to think I've starved it, and very likely turn from me, and being my godfather, that would be jolly serious. In fact, there are several reasons why I ought to find out who has done this, if I can."

I said: "It may be Fate. It may have died naturally."

He admitted this. He said: "That's where a post-mortem would come in, if it was a human being. Of course, Holmes never did post-mortems himself, that not being his work; but I've got to make one now. It may or may not help me."

He made it, and it didn't help him. My own opinion is, he didn't much like it and hurried it a good deal. He said there was no actual sign of violence on the surface of the guinea pig, and the organs all seemed perfectly healthy. But when I asked him what they would have looked like if they hadn't been healthy, he avoided answering, and went on that the pig's insides ought to have been sent up to Somerset House for examination by Government officials, in a hermetically sealed bottle. Peters rather believed that the public has a right to demand this service for the stomachs of friends if foul play is suspected; but not in the case of a domestic beast like a guinea pig.

So the pig was buried, and not until then did Peters really seem to set to work. The actual horror of the death gradually wore off, and he told me that he should now seriously tackle the case.

There was a most unusual lack of clues, he said; and he pointed out that even Sherlock Holmes could do nothing much until clues began to turn up. Peters warned me against always taking it for granted that James had done it. In fact, he said it was very unlikely to have been James, just because it looked so likely.

I said: "That may be the way Sherlock Holmes talks; but it seems to me to be rather footle."

And he said: "No, Maydew; it isn't footle; it is based on a study of the law of probabilities. If you read accounts of crime, you will see that, as a rule, the person who is suspected is innocent; and the more he is suspected, the more innocent he is."

I said: "Anyway, James has changed. He's gone down four places in his class, and lost his place in the second 'footer' eleven also. There's something on his mind."

"Yes," said Peters, "that's true. Everybody believes that he killed a valuable guinea pig, and treats him accordingly. That is quite enough to send him down four places in the class; but if he had killed the guinea pig, he would have brazened it out and have been prepared for this, and taken very good care not to show what he felt."

"In fact, you don't think he killed the pig," I said.

And Peters said he didn't think James had; but he was keeping an open mind.

Then came the most extraordinary clue of the ten-shilling piece. Happen-

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ing to go to his desk one day for toffee, Peters found in it a bit of paper tightly screwed up. He opened it and discovered in it no less than a gold ten-shilling piece; and on the paper, printed in lead pencil, were these words:

FOR ANUTHER GINNEA PIG

He said nothing to anybody but me — he seemed to think I was a sort of Dr. Watson in my way. Besides, it simplified the workings of his mind to talk out loud. So he showed me the clue and then asked me what I thought. I had rather picked up his dodge of talking like Sherlock Holmes, so I said:

"The first question is, of course, to see what is the date on the half-quid."

I thought this pretty good; but Peters said that this was not the first question, and didn't matter in the least.

He said: "My dear Maydew, the money is nothing; the paper in which it is wrapped up is everything."

So I turned to the paper.

"What does it tell you?" he asked.

"It tells me that some utter kid did it," I said, "for he can't spell 'another' and he can't spell 'guinea pig.' "

But Peters smiled and put the points of his fingers together like Sherlock Holmes.

"My dear Maydew," he said, "might not that have been done on purpose?"

Then I scored off him.

"It is just because it *might* have been done on purpose," I said, "that I think it was done accidentally."

He nodded.

"Of course, it may be the work of a kid," he admitted. "But, on the other hand, it may be a subterfuge. Besides, no kid would have killed my guinea pig. Where's the motive?"

"The great thing is that you've got a half-sovereign, and we share pocket money," I said.

But he attached little importance to that, except to say the half-sov. wasn't pocket money, though I might have half.

"Now examine the paper," he said.

I did so. It was a sheet of one of our ordinary lined copybooks, used for dictation, composition, exercises, and suchlike.

"Evidently torn out of one of the copybooks," I said.

"Exactly. But which one?"

"Ask me another," I said. "You'll never find that out."

He smiled and arranged his hands again like Holmes.

"I have," he said.

"Then you know?"

"On the contrary, I know nothing."

"It wasn't James's book?"

"It wasn't. The first thing was to find a book with a sheet torn out. I tried 25 books, and seven had pages torn out. But James's book had not. Then judge my surprise, Maydew, when, coming to my desk and looking at my own exercise book, I found a sheet torn out; and this is it, for the tear fits!"

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"What frightful cheek!" I cried out.

"I don't so much mind that," said Peters, "but the point is that, splendid though this clue seems to be on the surface, I can't get any forwarder by it. In fact, it may be the act of a friend, and not a foe."

"What would Sherlock Holmes do?" I asked; and Peters gave a sort of mournful sound and scratched his head.

"I wish I knew," he said.

Gideon was helpful in a way, but nobody could make much of it. Gideon said that it was conscience money, and was often known to happen, especially with the Income Tax; because people, driven to desperation by it, often pay too little, and then, when things brighten up for them afterwards, it begins to weigh on their minds if they are fairly decent at heart, and they remember that they have swindled the King and been dishonest; and so they send the money secretly, but, of course, are too ashamed to say who they are.

I asked James if he had sent the money, and he swore he hadn't; but he did it in such an excitable way that I was positive he had. Peters wouldn't believe or disbelieve. He went quietly on, keeping an open mind and detecting the crime; and, when the truth came to light, Peters was still detecting.

But in the meantime happened the mystery of the pencil sharpener, and the two great mysteries were cleared up simultaneously, which Peters says is a common thing. You couldn't say that one cleared up the other, but, still, it did so happen that both came out in the same minute.

There was a boy whose name was Pratt, and his father was on the Stock Exchange of London. When the father went out to lunch, he saw many curious things sold by wandering London men, who are too poor to keep shops, but yet have the wish to sell things. These men stand by the pavement and display most queer and uncommon curiosities, such as walking spiders and suchlike; and once from one of these men Pratt's father bought quite a new sort of pencil sharpener of the rarest kind. It was shaped like a stirrup, and cut pencils well without breaking off the lead.

After a good week of this pencil sharpener, Pratt found it had been stolen out of his desk, and he told Peters about it, and Peters took up the case. I asked him if he was hopeful, and he said that there was always hope; but he also said rather bitterly that it was curious what a frightful lot of hard cases he had had since coming to Merivale. He said it was enough to tax anybody's reputation, and that each case seemed more difficult than the last.

I reminded him of one or two rather goodish things he had done in a small way, but he said that as yet he had not really brought off a brilliant stroke.

A week went by, and then Peters came to me in a state of frightful excitement.

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"The pencil sharpener!" he said.

"Have you got a clue?" I asked. But he could hardly speak for excitement, and forgot to put his hands like Holmes, or to try and arrange a "faraway" look on his face, or anything.

"Not only a clue," he said. "I know who took it!"

"This will be a great score for you when it comes out," I said.

"You swear you won't breathe a word?" he asked.

And I swore. Then he whispered the fearful news into my ear.

"The Doctor's taken it!" he said.

"He never would," I answered. "Pratt is positive that he left it in his desk."

"It is a case of purloining," said Peters, "and I wish it had happened to anybody else but the Doctor. It's rather terrible in its way; because if he once gets this habit and yields to temptation, with his unlimited power, who is safe?"

"It's much more a thing Browne would have done," I said, meaning a particularly hateful master who wore pink ties and elastic-sided boots.

Then Peters explained that when alone in the Doctor's study, waiting to give a message to Doctor Dunstan from Mr. Briggs, he chanced to look about, and saw on the mantelpiece Pratt's pencil sharpener and a pencil in course of being sharpened. The Doctor had evidently put them down there and been called away and forgotten them.

"What did you do?" I inquired.

"Well, Maydew," he said, "I asked myself what Sherlock would have done" — in confidential moments Peters sometimes spoke of the great Holmes as "Sherlock" — "and I remembered his wonderful presence of mind. He would have struck while the iron was hot, as the saying is, and taken the pencil sharpener there and then."

"By Jove! But you didn't?" I said.

For answer Peters brought the pencil sharpener out of his waistcoat pocket.

"Are you positive it's Pratt's?" I asked.

"Absolutely certain," he said. "It has the words 'Made in Bavaria' upon it; and, of course, this is a frightfully delicate situation to be in for me."

"Especially if the Doctor asks for it," I said.

"He won't dare," answered Peters; "but I've got a sort of strong feeling against letting anybody know who has done this. On one or two occasions, I believe, Holmes kept the doer of a dark deed a secret — to give him a chance to repent. It seems to me this is a case when I ought to do the same."

"If the Doctor cribs things, I don't see why you should keep it dark," I said; and Peters treated me rather rudely — in fact, very much like Holmes sometimes treats Watson.

"My dear Maydew," he said, "the things you don't see would fill a museum."

"Anyway, you'll have to give Pratt back his pencil sharpener," I said; and

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he admitted that this was true. The only thing that puzzled him was how to do it.

But, after all, Peters didn't puzzle long. He was thinking the next morning how to return the pencil sharpener to Pratt in a mysterious and Sherlock Holmes-like way, when just after prayers the Doctor stopped the school and spoke. He said:

"Boys, I have lost something, and though an article of little intrinsic worth, I cannot suffer it to go without making an effort to regain it. I say this for two reasons. The first and least is that the little contrivance so mysteriously spirited from my study is of the greatest service to me; while the second and important reason your own perspicuity may perhaps suggest. Things do not go without hands. Somebody has taken from my study what did not belong to him: and somebody, therefore, at this moment moves among you with an aching heart and a wounded conscience. Let that boy make his peace with God and with me before he closes his eyes tonight; and that no doubt or ambiguity may obscure the details of this event, I will now descend to particulars.

"Not long ago, a kindly friend conveyed to me a new form of pencil sharpener, which he had chanced to find exhibited in a stationer's shop at Plymouth, our great naval port. Knowing that my eyesight is not of the best, he judged this trifle would assist me in the endless task of sharpening pencils, which is not the least among my minor mechanical labors. And he judged correctly. The implement was distinguished by a great simplicity of construction. It consisted, indeed, of one small piece of metal somewhat resembling the first letter of the alphabet. I last saw it upon the mantelpiece in the study. I was actually using it when called away, and on my return forgot the circumstance. But upon retiring last night the incident reverted to memory while divesting myself of my apparel, and so indispensable had the pencil sharpener become to me that I resumed my habiliments, lighted a candle, and went downstairs to seek the sharpener. It had disappeared. Now, yesterday several boys came and went, as usual, through the precincts of my private apartments. Furthermore, the Greek Testament class will recollect that we were engaged together in the evening from 7 until 8 o'clock. I need say no more. The loss is discovered and the loss is proclaimed. I accuse nobody. Many things may have happened to the pencil sharpener, and if any boy can throw light upon the circumstance, let him speak with me tonight after evening chapel. I hope it may be possible to find an innocent solution of my loss; but if one of you has fallen under sudden temptation, and, attracted by the portability and obvious advantages of the instrument, has appropriated it to his own uses, I must warn him that my duty will be to punish as well as pardon. The hand of man, however, is light as compared with the anger of an outraged Deity. If a sinner is cower-

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ing among you at this moment, with my pencil sharpener secreted about his person, let that sinner lose no time, but strengthen his mind to confess his sin, that he may the sooner turn over a new leaf and sin no more."

Then he hooked it to breakfast, and I spoke to Peters. I said:

"This is pretty blue for you."

But he said, far from it. He said:

"On the contrary, Maydew. It's blue for the Doctor; and it shows — what he's always saying to us himself, for that matter — that if you do a wrong thing, you've nearly always got to do another, or perhaps two, to bolster up the first. He has told a deliberate, carefully planned lie — and a barefaced lie, too; because he must know that he stole the thing out of Pratt's desk. Anyhow, my course is clear."

I said I was glad to hear that, because it didn't look at all clear to me. Then Peters said:

"I, personally, have got nothing to do with the Doctor's wickedness in the matter. In my opinion that is Pratt's affair."

But I felt pretty sure Pratt wouldn't bother about it.

"Anyway," said Peters, "I now return Pratt his pencil sharpener, and there my duty as the detective of the case ceases."

So the first thing after morning class we went to Pratt, and Peters put on his Holmes manner and said:

"Well, Pratt, no news of the missing pencil sharpener, I suppose?"

Pratt said: "Mine or the Doctor's?"

And Peters said: "Yours."

"Yes, there is," said Pratt. "I found it in my lexicon three days ago. I'd marked a word with it and clean forgotten. So that's all right."

"Not so right as you might think," I said.

But Peters kept his nerve jolly well, and, in fact, was more like Sherlock Holmes at that terrible moment than ever I saw him before or after.

"I'm glad it's turned up," said Peters, "and I hope the Doctor's will."

Then he and I went off, and I congratulated him.

"You've got a nerve of iron," I said.

"Yes," he said, "and I shall want it."

Then he told me there was nothing like this in Sherlock Holmes, and that the whole piece of detective work was a failure, and a very painful failure to him.

"I don't mind the licking, and so on," he said, "but it's the inner disgrace."

"It was a very natural mistake," I said, to cheer him up.

"Yes," he said, "but detectives of the first class don't make natural mistakes — nor any other sort, either. It's the disappointment of coming such a howler over a simple felony that is so hard. At least, of course, it's not a felony at all."

"All the same, it can't be helped, unless you chuck away the pencil sharpener and sit tight about it," I said.

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"No, Maydew. Of course, I could evade the consequences with ease, if I liked. But I have decided to give this back to the Doctor and tell him the whole story," said Peters.

"Sherlock Holmes would never have done that," I said.

"No, he wouldn't," admitted Peters. "Because why? Because he'd never have been such a fool as to be deluded by a false clue."

"Well," I said, "if you take my advice for once, you'll do this: You'll leave that thing on the Doctor's desk in a prominent place next time you're in there alone, and you'll bury the rest in your brain. What's the sense of going out of your way to get a licking?"

"If I told him the truth, I don't believe he would lick me," said Peters. But I jolly soon showed him that was rot.

"My dear chap," I said, "you go to the Doctor and say: 'Here's your pencil sharpener, sir; I saw it on your mantelpiece, and thought you'd stolen it from Pratt, who has one exactly like it. So I took it to give to Pratt, but his has turned up since.' Well, what would happen then? Any fool could tell you."

All the same Peters went up next day at the appointed time, and, curiously enough, James was in the study waiting for the Doctor too. The muddle that followed was explained to me by Peters afterwards.

He and James began to talk; then James said to Peters: "I am here, Peters, about a very queer and sad thing, and it is evidently Providence that has sent you here now."

And Peters said: "No, it isn't. I am here about a very queer thing too, and it may also turn out to be sad — for me."

Then James, who was excited, said these strange words: "I had come to confess that it was me killed your guinea pig. I couldn't hide it any more. It's haunting me — not the pig, but the killing of it. I hoped, and even prayed in my prayers, that you might detect me, but you didn't. Then I wrote home for ten shillings for a debt of honor, and put it in your desk, and disguised the writing and spelling. And now, as you are here, I confess it openly to you that I killed your beautiful, kind-hearted pig, and I hope you'll forgive me for doing a beastly, blackguard thing. And if you can't forgive it, I'll tell the Doctor and get flogged rather than go on like this; because it's haunting me."

Peters said: "How did you do it?"

And James said: "With poison from the laboratory."

And Peters was so much rejoiced when he heard this that he forgave the worm, James, on the spot.

"That is where sending the stomach to Somerset House would have come in!" said Peters. "But as I was not in a position to do this, I do not feel the slur of not having discovered you were the criminal."

He forgave James freely. Then he said: "You may be amused to know that I am also here about a crime.

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I thought I'd found one out, and, instead of that, I've jolly well committed a crime myself."

Then he told the story of the pencil sharpener to James, and showed James the pencil sharpener to prove it. James actually had the pencil sharpener in his hand, when who should come in — not the Doctor — but the matron, with the extraordinary news that the mother of Peters was just arrived and had to see him at once! This was so surprising to Peters that he went straight away to the drawing-room and left the pencil sharpener with James; and in the drawing-room were the Doctor and Peters's mother, who, after all, had merely come to tell him that his uncle was dead. But far more important things than that happened in the study, because when Peters arrived to see his mother, the Doctor, having said something about bearing the shocks of life with manly fortitude, went off to his study, and there, of course, was James waiting for him.

And we heard afterwards what James did. First, on thinking it over, he began to doubt why he should confess about the guinea pig to the Doctor, now that Peters had utterly forgiven him. And he speedily decided that there was no occasion to do it. But then, out of gratitude to Peters, he determined to carry through the delicate task of getting the pencil sharpener back to the Doctor. And he did. He told the Doctor that he had taken the thing, because he thought it was Pratt's. He said he felt sure Pratt must have left it in the study by mistake. But he didn't say anything about thinking the Doctor had stolen it, and, in fact, was so jolly cunning altogether that he never got into a row at all. The Doctor ended up by remarking that Pratt's having one was a curious coincidence, and he said to James: "As for you, James, you stand acquitted of everything but too much zeal. Zeal, however ——" and then he talked a lot of stuff about zeal, which James did not remember.

I said privately to Peters afterwards:

"How would Holmes have acted if this had happened to him?"

And Peters said: "For once I can see as clear as mud what Sherlock would have done. He would have said: 'I think in this extraordinary case, Watson, we may safely let well alone.' "

And that's what Peters did.

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Henry Myers, you will remember (from the preface to his prize-winning story of last year, "Nothing So Hard As a Diamond"), has made a brilliant record in nearly all fields of writing. He is the author of 50 plays, many motion picture scripts and television shows, as well as musicals, operas, and novels. His novel, THE UTMOST ISLAND, *was a Book-of-the-Month selection in 1951. His most recent novel,* O KING, LIVE FOREVER, *appeared last year and received excellent notices. Now, Mr. Myers is continuing his short-story career which he began in the pages of EQMM. His newest prize-winner is an absorbing story. If you read it during the day, it will keep you on the edge of your chair; but if you should happen to read it at night, you won't rush to put the light off after you have finished. For it is a tale of strange and terrifying dreams, of a man who simply had to keep awake . . . and it is in the finest tradition of EQMM's Bedtime Stories.*

THE PALE SERGEANT

by HENRY MYERS

IN A CERTAIN OLD SONG THE FOLLOWing passage occurs:

When pale sergeant Death
in his arms shall enfold me—

To a lover of exact words that passage has a special interest, for it uses the original, medieval meaning of the word "sergeant": that is, an agent of the court who arrested fugitives, evidently by flinging his arms about them. The sergeant seems to have been a civil, not a military officer, and Shakespeare makes the dying Hamlet say: "This fell sergeant, Death, is strict in his arrest."

Whether he is pale or fell, the notion of Death as a law-enforcement officer seems not only poetic but valid. If the special kind of fear Death usually arouses can be disregarded, he shows a grotesque resemblance to a policeman, notably in the various ways he affects the public. As is the case with his uniformed colleague, people pay lip-service to the law he enforces; yet they try to outwit him, and the law, too, if they can. Then again, his efficiency and thoroughness are everywhere acknowledged; yet many wish his activities could be dispensed with. And he is often called a friend; yet no one really thinks of him as such, for who can feel friendly

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toward either a night-stick or a scythe?

But there is another, basic similarity between the pale sergeant and the desk sergeant. The reason both of them are able to make arrests, almost at will, is that most people believe in the law being enforced. Despite the natural lawlessness which exists in everybody, those who resist the law openly are relatively few, and easily handled. Most citizens are so in the habit of conforming with the law that they often cooperate with the very officer who is arresting them; this happens even though they think they are resisting, and seem outwardly to be doing so.

Take the case of the fat little harassed man whom I met a short time ago in a country hotel. It was the first time I understood the feelings, which I do not share, of one who seeks to escape from the terrible arresting officer. And I think the incident illumines the behavior of the pale sergeant himself who, after all, is only doing what is expected of him.

It was not a very inviting time to be in that particular town, for it is a seaside summer resort, and this was the middle of winter. My own reason for being in such a place at such a season was practical: I sell an article which has a year-round use, and I was on a business trip. The fat little harassed man, from his point of view, had as logical a reason for his presence. I might have appreciated it better if I had been in his shoes, fleeing from his fears.

We met late one night when we both gravitated to the bar. The few other guests had gone to bed. Only we two seemed to have preoccupations that kept us awake and thinking.

He spoke first, beginning abruptly with what was on his mind. He was clearly under a great strain, and his nerves could not have endured a gradual, formal opening, such as commenting on the weather, the sound of the breakers, or the contrast with mid-season activity. He began by speaking about Death.

What he plainly needed, desperately — even more than he needed his drink — was someone who would do him the simple favor of listening. Anyone would have answered the purpose, and if no one had been present, I think he might have spoken to the wall, or into his glass. When I understood this, I let him do all the talking, limiting myself to an occasional "Yes" or "I see" — merely to show him my attention was alive. My one positive contribution was to pick up my drink, and lead the way to a pair of comfortable leather chairs that stood before the pleasant wood fire. He followed me, talking all the while, and continuing as we sat. I hope I do not seem unfeeling when I say I was fascinated by his curious obsession.

"I don't suppose you do much reading on the subject of Death," he said. "Very few people do, unless they are doctors or chemists, or have some such technical occupation. In fact, I don't see why anyone should. It is the most dreadful thing we are ever called

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upon to consider, and no one does so by choice. Were it not that I happen to have run across something which bears a striking application to myself — To tell the truth, I am rather ashamed to have let it upset me so. Looked at sensibly, it is not worthy of attention. It is nothing but a myth, an old wives' tale, at which a grown man should smile. Its nearest claim to respect is that it exists in all languages and all countries, and is one of the most ancient and persistent legends about Death.

"Briefly, it states that he always gives three warnings to his victims. You know: as if he is abiding by some rule. I understand there was something of the kind in old Saxon law, by which the arresting officer was required to serve a summons three times; the third time only was he authorized to use force.

"I know there is a physical explanation of this ancient belief, with which I really should dismiss the whole thing. The three warnings are supposed to represent the loss of hair, teeth, and sight, and thus symbolize the approach of old age. That *is* rational, isn't it?"

I answered "Yes" because that was what he wanted, though I thought the point could be argued. I simply did not wish to contradict him, or to interrupt. It would have been cruel. And it wasn't necessary: he at once rejected the explanation himself, showing that he hadn't really believed it.

"There is another variation of the legend," he went on, "which seems more plausible to me, if indeed any explanation can be called plausible. It states that the warnings come in the shape of dreams, on three consecutive nights; in the third dream, Death himself appears and makes his capture. I cannot brush this version away, as I can the others. For, you see —" He ran his fingers backward through his hair and looked up at the ceiling: one of the few ways in which a sane man may say mad things and not be thought mad. "I have had two warnings. Two dreams about Death, on two consecutive nights." He paused, for a long, long time, as if hesitating to make his point; then he did so, very simply: "Last night and the night before."

He waited for me to grasp this, and perhaps to grasp it himself. Again I said "I see," with my voice as respectfully hushed as I could make it.

"As a reasonable man," he resumed, "I have two ways of approaching this. Either I must consider it an absurd fixation, of which I should rid myself, with or without the aid of a psychiatrist; or else there is a million-to-one chance there is something in it, in some way that science does not yet take into account. The fixation, if such it be, I will attend to in due course. The million-to-one chance that my fear is warranted, I will guard against at once. I shall not risk frightening myself to death in a third dream. I mean to stay awake all tonight. That will break the consecutive chain of three, which seems to be an essential

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part of the pattern. It will stop him, or it, or my own nerves — or whatever is doing it. That's why I have come here, in the off-season. A strange place, a strange bed, the unaccustomed sound of breakers. Nothing restful. Nothing that suggests sleep. I have to be practical, don't you think so? Even against so wild a possibility?"

"Yes," I replied.

"I hope you are not merely agreeing in order to reassure me," he said, sensing that I was doing precisely that. "It would be most kind of you, but I think you might agree more heartily if you knew what these dreams of mine were like. To me they had — they have — a fearful reality, a clear-spoken message which abides no possible misinterpretation. . . . May I tell you about them?"

By now I feared that any sound whatever might upset him; so I did not even say "Yes," but merely nodded.

"The first dream," he said, "was curious for a number of reasons, but chiefly because I seemed to be engaged in a trade with which I haven't the slightest connection. I was, of all things, a spiritualistic medium! I am by temperament out of sympathy with the idea of supernaturalism, so that a vision of myself in the role of table-tapper appears monstrous to me. And monstrous the whole experience was, in the sense that there was something huge and awful about it. Huge and awful. That is the sensation that has possessed me during these past two nights.

"Now mind you, in my dream I was no charlatan, preying on the hopes of unhappy people who have lost their loved ones. I was sincere, convinced. I knew — didn't just think, but *knew* — that I could communicate with the dead. I had a solid basis for this knowledge, for it had somehow been arranged that I should soon be one of them: therefore, they and I already had something in common. Of course, in my dream I didn't reason this out; I merely felt that it was so. I tell you this because the feeling of the dream was more important than its details.

"Well, then, in the pursuit of this strange calling of mine I found myself on a railroad train, rushing at frantic speed toward a particular town where I was to give a séance. My fellow-passengers were commuters to that town, and would be my audience when we arrived there. So I walked down the aisle of the car, distributing handbills which announced that I would evoke the dead.

"Then I realized that the train had passed my destination without stopping. I tried to find the conductor so that I might call his attention to the error. He was not to be found, and I experienced the unpleasant dream-sensation of being dragged farther and farther from a desired goal. I turned to the other passengers for aid, but they were strangely unperturbed. They appeared to have known that this would happen and were now waiting calmly for still another expected event.

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"That other event — ! It was to be a head-on collision with another train, a frightful crash that would split and rend us all. There ahead, up the track, the other train was coming, with its whistle shrieking its approach. My helplessness and horror were great, but somehow less great than my surprise at the quiet and unconcern of the other passengers. And then, with one accord, they all turned and looked at me. Their gaze was calm. They were interested only in me, in seeing how I was affected by what was happening. Then I knew.

"These were the dead. I had promised to evoke them, and they had come to meet me.

"I awoke. Just in time, just in time . . ."

He drank, deeply and slowly, to take the edge off his recollection. For a moment he looked into the fire, seeming to draw comfort from the glow. Then sharply, almost violently, he looked the other way. "I mustn't do that," he said. "A man can hypnotize himself looking into a fire, and fall asleep — and dream."

He frowned angrily at this possibility of self-betrayal, then concentrated again on his recital, as if constant speech were his only safeguard. "Last night's dream," he said, "was different. Only as to incident and detail, that is; I am not sure it was different in its essence or in its meaning.

"It seemed that I was entertaining a dozen or so of my friends, at dinner. Despite our outward gaiety, a pall hung over us, for it had been predicted that one of us would die within twenty-four hours. No one knew which it was to be, though all wondered. That same, hard-to-define certainty of doom, you see. At last I, as host, in order to ease the tension, made a suggestion: not a very original one, for I have heard of its having been made before. I proposed that we all meet for dinner again, in the same place, on the following night, and that all should pledge themselves to attend — whether alive or not. A tremendous answering 'Yes!' was shouted, in unison, somewhat melodramatically, as judged by waking standards.

"Instantly, without the time-interval that would normally elapse, it was the following night. All had kept the appointment, and were seated about my table exactly as they had the preceding night. The certainty of doom had become greater, for we knew that one of our number was indeed dead, as had been foretold. But which? Which one?

"Then the occasion turned somehow into an official function. I arose to make a speech. I realized, I told the gathering, that the next world has peculiar laws, under which its inhabitants are forbidden to declare themselves. However, I announced that I had prepared a test, by the application of which we could respect those laws and yet learn which of us had died. It is known, I said, that a dead man casts no reflection in a mirror, and I had a large, horizontal one on the wall. Would we all be good enough to stand before it?

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"Their applause indicated their approval. They followed me in single file to where a long glass hung on the wall, covered by a curtain. There we stood, shoulder to shoulder, stiffly, like a row of well-drilled guardsmen. I whisked the curtain away. As I did so, I knew that the feeling of doom was justified. The dead had again come to meet me.

"For the only one reflected in the mirror was — myself!"

Now, with the completion of what he had to tell, I saw a change in him. Or rather, it seemed there had been a change in him up to this point, and he now returned to being his own, deepest self. It was as if he had put off facing an actuality by talking about it instead. The determination to elude his pursuer seemed to have vanished. Perhaps I should say, he did not even want to elude him, had never really wanted to. At the bottom of his frightened little soul he was now subscribing to the law he had been opposing.

He finished his drink. His hand was shaking, but he did not trouble to wipe away the drops that escaped from the glass and trickled down his chin. When his head came down again to its accustomed level, he found himself gazing into the fire. This time he did not force himself to look away, but continued staring into it, steadily, with a perverse compulsion to do the very thing against which he had previously cautioned himself.

I waited for him to say something more, but it was so long before he did that it seemed he must have dozed. At length, he did speak, but it was in a dull, colorless voice, like that of a somnambulist. There was no conviction — as if only his mouth spoke and he himself were not behind it. His tone was low.

"It has to be three times," he said. "This is the third night, and he has not come for me. He has not come for me. He has not come for me." He kept this up for some time, in an imbecilic singsong, which at last diminished and faded into silence and sleep.

When I saw that, I arose from my chair.

"But you know," I said to him, "that I *have* come for you." With that, I did what I had to do: what, indeed, the law requires me to do on such occasions. I stepped toward him with my arms outstretched, the better to enfold him.

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

We are proud and happy to publish another short-short story by Mark Van Doren, who is one of America's finest poets (he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940 for his COLLECTED POEMS*), who is one of America's most perceptive critics (read his books on Shakespeare and Dryden, and his critical studies of Homer, Milton, Dante, Chaucer, Byron, and Wordsworth, among others), and last but certainly not least, one of America's outstanding teachers and lecturers (although he is now in semi-retirement from his professorship at Columbia University). It has been said of Mark Van Doren's short stories that they are concerned not so much with central themes, but with individual emotions and individual ideas. We are not sure that is true, but we are sure that his stories possess a deep feeling for humanity, a deep understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. His tone is always simple and underplayed, yet as Irwin Edman said of Mr. Van Doren's poetry, ". . . some people do not realize that a voice so quiet can be so forceful, and distinguished."*

APRIL FOOL

by MARK VAN DOREN

THE WARDEN HELD THE RECEIVER away, shook it as if it were a naughty child, and said to Bates who had just come in: "Look at the calendar." It was April 1st. "My wife fooled me this morning — said there was salt in my coffee. I tried it — there wasn't — and now that jackass in the tower says there's a man down in the yard. Just standing there — a man —"

"But there is," said Bates, as if that were what he had come in about. Not that he didn't belong here, being the warden's secretary.

"What did you say?"

"There *is* a man. Just standing there, as Seabrook says. Funny thing — come see for yourself."

The warden winked at him. "You too?"

But when Bates opened the door for him he couldn't refuse to go. He tried to look wise in advance, but still he went heavily across the corridor, opened the steel shutter at the peephole that was his alone, and stared down into the enclosure where daylight had begun to play its game of painting the gray walls and ground.

Bates knew what the warden saw, and was not surprised by his

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silence. Only the round shoulders of the warden, massive in their blue coat, moved a little forward, closer to the hole. He saw what Bates had seen from a small window on the second floor. There was nothing in the yard but a man in a white shirt, standing rather dumbly in the exact center of the dreary space where later on there would be prisoners in droves, all keeping in motion while they took the air. But now he was the only thing, human or unhuman, between the cell block and the outer wall. Of course, there was the freight car that came in weekly, at midnight, with supplies. The great iron door behind it had lifted for ten minutes, and men outside, with crowbars at the wheels, had eased it in, on its own short spur of track, to be unloaded by the 10 o'clock detail. Besides that and the stranger in the white shirt — nothing.

The warden closed the shutter and turned around — quickly, for him, Bates thought; although there was some cat in him too — he often got places before you knew he had started.

"He couldn't be just a gag, I guess."

"I don't see how." Bates grinned, then suddenly stopped.

"What's been done about him?" asked the warden. "Why is he standing there? Looks bolted to the concrete."

"He may have noticed he was covered from the towers. He may think he shouldn't move."

"Towers? Why, he's not one of us." He meant, not one of the 3014.

"Isn't he?"

The warden mocked him. "Is he?"

"Well, who knows yet? At least, he's gun shy. He's got a good idea where he is."

"Who wouldn't have? Bates, we'll go down and interview him. Bring your pencil, and get Randall out of Tier 3. Relieve him any way you want to, but get him down here."

"Randall?"

"Yes. He knows more faces than anybody — been shifted more, top tiers and bottom. A-1 guard, Randall. Quick now. I'll meet you both at the admission door."

They found him telephoning there; and Randall, whose gray hair was not the only sign of his seniority among the guards — his lean face, narrow at the eyes, was quite without illusion — seemed to approve of what he heard.

To Bates, waiting behind him, Randall said over his shoulder: "He's ordering a count."

The warden replaced the instrument on its shelf in the wall and nodded to both of them, but particularly to Bates, whose good-natured countenance showed unmistakable surprise.

"Why not? You told me to."

"Who, me?"

"You thought he might be one of ours. You said so — or gave me the idea. They'll tell us in ten minutes whether anybody's missing. And while they're doing that we'll have a talk with this man. All right!" The last was to a young guard at the door, who opened it at once for them.

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The stranger had trouble keeping his head up as they approached him, the warden in the lead. Bates glanced up at both the towers — it *would* be depressing if those caps, those faces, were suspicious of you. A bleak place.

"What are you doing here?" The warden, naturally, was blunt.

The man looked up at last. He even tried to grin. He was pale, with short black hair that grew well down toward his eyes. His patched white shirt was open at the collar. His gray pants, held up at the waist by a piece of clean clothesline, were frayed at the cuffs. He had canvas shoes on, so nearly worn out that anyone could see that his feet were bare of socks.

"Well, I don't know myself, hardly." His eyes dropped to the concrete again. He was very nervous.

"What does that mean? Do you know *where* you are? What's your name?"

"Smith."

"Spell it."

"S — em —"

"Stop it. Got a first name? Bates, you're taking this down?"

"Yes, sir."

"Frank," said the man.

"Now that's a nice name. Frank Smith. Did you hear me — do you know where you are?"

The man laughed a little, uneasily and without mirth. "State Prison? Looks that way. I never —"

"No, of course. Now, my friend, it hurts us not to know one thing. How the hell did you get in here? Where'd you come from?"

The man looked relieved, as if this were the subject he knew best. He brightened suddenly, and pointed. "The boxcar."

"What?"

They all looked at it. Bates took off his glasses.

"I was in that last night, sir. Thought I was going to Chicago — got in at Centralia — thought it was bound north all the way."

"Bumming a ride?"

"Yes, sir."

"North, eh? How do you know this isn't north? Could even be Chicago."

"Is it?" The man seemed not to have entertained that possibility.

"No, it isn't. It's Menard. Ever hear of Menard?"

"No, sir."

"Bates, check in the supply room. See if this car came from Centralia. If they can't say, have them call the freight agent. No, Randall, you do it."

Randall, reluctant to go, went nevertheless. He had been studying the stranger, and his study wasn't completed.

"Funny," remarked the warden, musing as if to himself. "That car should have been sealed — you oughtn't to have been able to get in. I can tell from here it isn't sealed. Not now. What was inside?"

"Boxes. Barrels. I didn't notice much — there was room to lay down."

"Then it stopped, and after a while you looked out and saw — this. When was that?"

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"Don't know. But it was dark. I thought we'd start again. This morning, though —"

"Mmm. Did *they* see you getting out?" The warden gestured ponderously toward the towers.

"They might have. The lights kept turning round. I got out when it was still dark — pretty dark. Between the lights — I didn't jump when they was on me."

"You didn't like the lights."

"No, sir. Listen, can I go now? Would you let me out?" His anxiety, thought Bates, would be natural either way. Still, it was anxiety.

"Hold your horses. Here's Randall. Well?"

"It came from Centralia, all right." Randall had a slip of paper in his hand, and he gave it to the warden. "From Wohlstadt."

The warden unfolded the paper, read something on it, and grunted.

"That checks," he said. "3014 — the usual. And Centralia checks. Smith — you're a vagrant, and that can't be your name — Smith, I'll be damned if I don't believe — it's mighty funny, but it *could* be — never was before, but then it *could* be! Smith, I think I'll let you go."

The man looked at the ground again. He was excited — they all saw that — and his feet twitched; his toes worked at the worn spots in his shoes. But he didn't glance up once; he didn't say one word.

"Just come in a minute — up to my office — for the record. Then they'll let you out."

"No! *No*, sir! Can't I go now?"

"Why, what's the matter? Don't you like the place? It's not so bad. I *live* here."

But the man's terror was uncontrollable.

Randall said quietly: "Warden, I wouldn't do it."

"Do what?"

"Decide so quick. There's something wrong about it to my mind."

The warden shrugged his shoulders. "There would be, for you. But then I brought you out here just for that. You mean you recognize him? Or you think somebody might?"

"No, but —"

"Well, but what?"

"His clothes."

Bates looked, but the warden didn't. They were not prison clothes, of course. That had been the first thing in the fellow's favor, and it still was, or ought to be.

"What about the clothes?"

"Too clean."

Randall raised his voice as he said it. He wasn't confidential; he wasn't saving anybody's feelings.

The warden jumped as the man did. Then the man started to run; but stopped at the second step. There was no place to run. There was nothing to do but what he did do, suddenly. He gritted his teeth and pounded his fists together. "God damn! God damn!"

"Take him in, Randall." The warden sighed. "Put him in Temporary till I find out. Then come to the office. And you, Bates, follow me."

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"You, now" — to the prisoner — "what's your name?" But the prisoner, already moving off with Randall, was answering no more questions. He was whimpering.

"Name, Gershoy. Number, 2458. Tier 7. He worked in the laundry." Randall, sitting opposite the warden at his desk, was asking for no praise, but he got some all the same.

"The laundry," said the warden. "Assembled his outfit there, I suppose" — Randall nodded — "but forgot to wipe the floor with it. Clever of you, Randall, to realize no boxcar could ever be as clean as *he* was. Inside or out, he'd have picked up plenty of grime. A plain fact, and we didn't see it." He lifted an eyebrow at Bates, who was walking the floor behind Randall. "Good work. I'm putting it on your record. Ferguson — his record's closed. He was responsible to Wohlstadt for the count in Tier 7. Do you know what he did? Gershoy's been playing sick for a week, and Ferguson thought the dummy on his cot was him. Just *thought* so. When I say count, I mean count, and I expected Ferguson to know that! Every man up and at the bars, holding on with both hands — that's what I mean when I say count! Ferguson's out."

Like apes, with both arms up, thought Bates. Ferguson was at least half human; he cut corners for a man he thought was sick. The warden's all human. He hates it twice as much, and hardly shows he does.

The warden sighed as he had done outdoors. "You know," he said, "I can't help feeling sorry for Frank Smith. How long do you suppose it took him to get that costume together? He *made* the shirt, they tell me, out of handkerchiefs and rags. The pants — he won't say whose they were. Or the shoes. The clothesline was clean, too. He must have been so full of his idea that he fell down on the facts. But he did know all about the car. He studied that — and guessed right. He couldn't have known about Centralia."

"Maybe he could," said Randall. "There might be others in on this."

"There you go!" complained the warden. "Well, one's enough for now. The poor fool — he can't swim, or he'd have tried the old way, the west wall and over the river. Or maybe he doesn't like to be shot at. Who does? And yet he shot his wife once — that's why he's here."

"She got well, didn't she?" said Bates.

"*Pretty* well. The part of her he left. He says he wanted to see her. He would have, in six months."

"Idiot," said Randall. "How many now?"

"That isn't up to me," the warden murmured as he glanced over at the calendar again. "Poor fool."

Bates hoped he meant Ferguson too. Soft-hearted in the spring. Over the west wall the far shore of the Mississippi, where the bend was, looked greener every day.

Poor April fool.

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Another modern radio drama by John Dickson Carr, written for the program called "Suspense," and broadcast in 1942 by CBS . . . Listen to The Man in Black as he describes the quality of suspense: "The thrill of the night-time. The hushed voice and the prowling step. The crime that is almost committed. The finger of suspicion pointing, perhaps at the wrong man. The stir of nerves at the ticking of the clock. The rescue that might be too late, or the murderer who might get away . . ."

WILL YOU MAKE A BET WITH DEATH?

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

The Characters

BETTY ANDREWS.....*who visits The Haunted Mill*
ROBERT PENDEREL.....*who meets her there*
JOHN DESTRY.....*Penderel's stepfather*
and a BARKER, *an* INSPECTOR, *a* SERGEANT, *etc.*

Coney Island on a summer day . . . There's the beach, bright-colored with bathing suits. There's the boardwalk, all straw hats and summer dresses. There's the ferris wheel and the roller coasters and the merry-go-round. There's all humanity eating hot dogs and having a good time. And over there, beyond that souvenir shop, is The Haunted Mill. You get into a little boat that holds only two. You float through a narrow tunnel into the dark, while witches scream. But that doesn't fool anybody, does it? There couldn't be any real *terror . . . could there? . . while the bands are playing, and the crowd goes by, and we hear . . .*

BARKER: I'm telling you, ladies and gentlemen! A *u*-nique attraction! It hurts me, I say it hurts me, to see you stand there and miss this! Only ten cents, one dime, the miserable tenth-part of a dollar, to go through the old Haunted Mill and get the thrill of your lives!

BETTY: An overstatement, if you ask me. One ticket, please.

BARKER: (*Startled*) Did you say *ONE* ticket, lady?

BETTY: That's right. One ticket. What's the thrill?

BARKER: I beg pardon, lady?

BETTY: I said, what's the thrill?

BARKER: Lady, the gals who come here with their boy friends don't have to ask that. Ten cents please. This way, and mind the gate. (*Louder*) Step right up, ladies and

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gentlemen! Get your tickets for the old Haunted Mill, where ghosts walk and corpses . . .

PENDEREL: Give me some tickets. Hurry!

BARKER: Now just a minute, young fellow! I know you want to get into the old Haunted Mill, but there's plenty of time! How many tickets?

PENDEREL: *I* don't know. Better give me ten.

BARKER: Ten tickets? (*Louder*) You hear that, ladies and gentlemen? Here's a young fellow who likes the old Haunted Mill so much he buys *ten* tickets!

PENDEREL: (*Under his breath*) Don't call everybody's attention to me! Listen: I've got a better idea. Whatever boat comes *after* mine . . .

BARKER: Yeah?

PENDEREL: I'll give you an extra dollar to send that boat through empty.

BARKER: What's the matter, son? (*Under his breath*) The cops ain't after you, are they?

PENDEREL: No, no, it's nothing like that! Will you do it?

BARKER: Money talks, young fellow. O.K. Go ahead . . .

PENDEREL: Isn't there an empty boat here?

BETTY: Well, really! If you've got such a great objection to riding in the same boat with me. . . .

PENDEREL: I — I'm sorry! I didn't mean that at all.

BETTY: Then you'd better get in, if you want to go at all. This boat's starting to move.

(*Faint splashing and slapping of water, as in a narrow tunnel*)

PENDEREL: Look here, I want to apologize!

BETTY: That's quite unnecessary. This place is rather childish, isn't it?

PENDEREL: Yes. Isn't it?

BETTY: But I've seen everything else, so I may as well see this. Here we go, into the dark.

(*They hear a loud burst of machine-like, brassy laughter*)

PENDEREL: What was that?

BETTY: One of the ghosts, I imagine. From a machine.

PENDEREL: It sounded like *him* laughing. There isn't anybody in the boat behind us, is there?

BETTY: I can't see. It's pitch-dark.

PENDEREL: Listen, Miss . . . Miss . . .

BETTY: My name is Andrews, Betty Andrews — if it's customary to exchange names in a place like this.

PENDEREL: Mine is Penderel, Bob Penderel.

BETTY: Did you say Penderel?

PENDEREL: Yes. Do you know it?

BETTY: Not — not exactly. It's an unusual name, that's all.

PENDEREL: I don't want you to think I'm out of my mind, though I very nearly am. But I've got five hours to go. Just five hours! At the end of that time, either I'll have won twenty-five thousand dollars, or else . . .

BETTY: Or else?

PENDEREL: Or else I'll be dead.

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(*Another burst of brassy laughter*)

BETTY: (*Frightened*) You know, I wish I had kept you away from this boat!

PENDEREL: There's nothing to get alarmed about. For *you*. I had to tell somebody or I'd have started yelling. There's just one other thing.

BETTY: Yes?

PENDEREL: In these places they've usually got little dim-lighted rooms along the way. Exhibits.

BETTY: Yes. Ghosts and things.

PENDEREL: When we come to one, I'm going to get out of this boat and hide there. Don't be afraid — and don't tell anybody when you go out.

BETTY: But why should you *do* that?

PENDEREL: (*Absent-mindedly*) I think I see a light ahead.

BETTY: It *is* a light. But . . .

PENDEREL: Dim, too. That's all to the good. It's . . . yes, we're coming round the corner. It's the old mill 'loft,' with a wax dead man on a pile of straw. Goodbye, Betty Andrews. I wish we'd met at a different time.

BETTY: Watch out! (*Splashings*)

PENDEREL: Here! What are *you* doing?

BETTY: Getting out too.

PENDEREL: Don't be an idiot! What's the idea?

BETTY: You need looking after, Mr. Bob Penderel. If we must hide, I suppose this is as good a place as any.

PENDEREL: I won't have it!

BETTY: Quick! There'll be more boats along any moment! Over behind the dead man on the straw. Hurry! (*Footsteps*) Now, Mr. Bob Penderel, what is this all about?

PENDEREL: I can't tell you!

BETTY: You said yourself that if you don't tell somebody, you'll go crazy!

PENDEREL: (*With a deep breath*) Maybe you're right. It's against the strict terms of the bet, but this is the last day and I tell you I can't hold out much longer!

BETTY: Lower your voice — there's a boat coming.

PENDEREL: I wonder if you've ever heard of my stepfather, John Destry?

BETTY: Yes.

PENDEREL: I imagine everybody has. He's a millionaire and — I'm not. I'm a chemist, an analytical chemist. Not very successful. If I'd had time, if I'd had money, I might have worked out a process that would have . . . well, anyway . . . Destry's a big, white-haired, fine looking man. You'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. He's got an apartment in the East Sixties, and a secretary — I never met her — valet, cook, that kind of thing. He used to invite me there, but I wouldn't go. Then he got hold of a book I had to have — a German work on chemicals. So I went. After dinner, in that study of his, over the brandy . . .

(*Flashback to*)

DESTRY: My dear Robert, you're quite welcome to the book! Don't

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mention it! What do you think of this brandy, by the way?

PENDEREL: It's excellent, thanks.

DESTRY: Yes. Yes. I thought you'd like it. And now that we're all relaxed and comfortable after dinner, tell me something.

PENDEREL: Yes, Mr. Destry?

DESTRY: (*Changing his tone*) You hate my guts, don't you? (*Laughs*)

PENDEREL: Frankly, I do. And always have.

DESTRY: Good. Then you'll be relieved to hear I've always felt the same about you. But tell me something else. Did you ever know me to break my word?

PENDEREL: No, I never did. I'll give you that.

DESTRY: I asked you that, Robert, because I want to make a little bet with you. That is, if you have the nerve. Which I doubt.

PENDEREL: I'm afraid I can't afford to make bets.

DESTRY: You always were careless with money, Robert, where I've been thrifty. I saw that while your mother was still alive. But you can afford to make this bet. Look here! In my desk.

PENDEREL: Well?

DESTRY: Twenty-five thousand dollars, Robert. Twenty-five thousand dollars, in five-hundred-dollar bills.

PENDEREL: (*Bitterly*) And what would I have to bet against that?

DESTRY: Your life.

PENDEREL: My *life?*

DESTRY: There's the money on the table. Look at it. What wouldn't you give for that money? What wouldn't you give to have it for this precious work of yours that you're so fond of? And that you've failed in.

PENDEREL: So far I've failed! Yes!

DESTRY: Robert, I've had a fairly good life, as lives go. My heart isn't as good as it might be, but the doctors say I'll last a long time yet. And before I go there's one pleasure, one little exquisite thrill, I would like to experience. I want to commit a murder.

PENDEREL: *Murder!*

DESTRY: Yes, I said murder! I'll bet you that I can kill you within six months, that you can't stop me, and that I'll never be punished for it. What do you say? Yes or no?

PENDEREL: I believe you mean that!

DESTRY: Of course I mean it.

PENDEREL: And just how would you propose to — kill me?

DESTRY: Ah! That would be telling.

PENDEREL: You know, if I had time to think this thing over . . .

DESTRY: There's no need to think it over. Now! Yes or no?

PENDEREL: (*After a pause*) Yes.

DESTRY: (*Chuckles*) You must need the money badly, Robert.

PENDEREL: I do. But, oddly enough, Mr. Destry, that isn't why I'm doing this.

DESTRY: No?

PENDEREL: No. I want to show you, you can't play the Lord Almighty and get away with it.

DESTRY: Are you challenging me?

PENDEREL: Yes!

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DESTRY: You don't think I can do it?

PENDEREL: I know you can't.

DESTRY: You understand, of course, that there will be conditions to the bet.

PENDEREL: What conditions?

DESTRY: First of all, you will never mention this matter to anyone.

PENDEREL: All right. That seems fair enough.

DESTRY: You will remain within the city limits of New York for six months. You will spend at least one hour of every day walking the open streets — alone.

PENDEREL: Agreed.

DESTRY: You will spend at least one hour every evening in your own room — alone. I may come to see you, or I may not — as I please.

PENDEREL: Trying to scare me already?

DESTRY: Finally, you will write out a little note, and give it to me. There's pen and paper on the desk in front of you. Write it now.

PENDEREL: First let me hear what I have to write.

DESTRY: You will write, "*I am a failure* —"

PENDEREL: You can't stop harping on that, can you?

DESTRY: "*I am a failure, and this was the only way out. I wouldn't have done it otherwise.*"

PENDEREL: A suicide note?

DESTRY: Yes. I intend to use it when I . . . operate. . . .

PENDEREL: And if I won't write it?

DESTRY: Then there's no bet.

PENDEREL: All right, I'll do it.

DESTRY: It is now . . . let's see . . . nine o'clock on the night of January tenth. If you are alive, and not in a madhouse . . .

PENDEREL: Is that part of the bargain too?

DESTRY: Yes. At nine o'clock on the night of June tenth, given those conditions, you will receive twenty-five thousand dollars. Can't you hear the dice rattle, Robert? You're playing with death now.

PENDEREL: I know it.

DESTRY: Er — aren't you going to finish your brandy?

PENDEREL: No, thank you.

DESTRY: Then pour it back into the decanter . . . You heard me. Pour it back into the decanter. If you were as careful as I am, you wouldn't be where you are now. (*Sound of liquid poured into glass*) That's right. Always be thrifty. I can promise you, by the way, that you'll be perfectly safe as long as you're in this apartment. But that's the only concession I make. I notice your hands are steady, at the moment. I wonder what they'll be like a month from now. . . .

(*Back to The Haunted Mill*)

BETTY: So you were fool enough to make a bet like that with John Destry?

PENDEREL: Let me tell you what else happened that night. I left his place carrying that book he'd got for me. Remember?

BETTY: I remember.

PENDEREL: It was a damp, foggy night, and I was cold even under

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my overcoat. I got into a Fifth Avenue bus. I climbed to the top and sat down. . . .

(*Flashback to*)

CONDUCTOR: Hey! Young fellow! You!

PENDEREL: Yes?

CONDUCTOR: Your fare, please. Put a dime in the slot. Say, what's the matter with you?

PENDEREL: That . . . *book* . . .

CONDUCTOR: Here, wait a minute! You've got blood all over your thumb!

PENDEREL: It's a book on — poisons.

CONDUCTOR: You'd better wrap a handkerchief around that thumb of yours.

PENDEREL: There are safety-razor blades sewed in a line down the inside edge of the cover. When you open the book . . . Listen, Conductor! Listen!

CONDUCTOR: I'm listening.

PENDEREL: A little white card, with something written on it, fell out of the book. Do you see it?

CONDUCTOR: Yeah, I see it.

PENDEREL: Will you pick it up and read it for me?

CONDUCTOR: What's the matter? Can't you read yourself?

PENDEREL: Please pick it up and read it. Will you?

CONDUCTOR: All right; keep your shirt on! It says —

PENDEREL: Yes?

CONDUCTOR: It says, "*See how easy it is to take you off-guard?*"

PENDEREL: Anything . . . else?

CONDUCTOR: Yes. It says, "*Those razor-blades aren't poisoned. But they might have been. Take warning.*" Say, what is this? A joke?

PENDEREL: Yes, it's a joke.

CONDUCTOR: Some people got a queer idea of what's funny, haven't they? And I still want that fare, mister. . . .

(*Back to The Haunted Mill*)

PENDEREL: Betty, that was six months ago. Six months less five hours of careful, refined torture. And now I've got only five hours to go.

BETTY: What has he done in the meantime?

PENDEREL: Nothing.

BETTY: I don't understand.

PENDEREL: Nothing at all! That's the cleverness of it. He's left me waiting, waiting, waiting. . . .

BETTY: Expecting something?

PENDEREL: Expecting it every hour of the day or night. Once, at the laboratory where I work, I opened a box that I thought came from a chemical supply house. And a Mexican tarantula, one of those furry spiders about as big as your fist —

BETTY: No!

PENDEREL: — ran out across my hand. (*Pause*) It was a toy tarantula. He enclosed a card asking if I admired it.

BETTY: Bob, this can't go on!

PENDEREL: I used to think I didn't have a nerve in my body. I could hold a test tube at arm's length, absolutely steady, for minutes at a time. Now look at me.

BETTY: Don't, please.

PENDEREL: But the waiting's almost

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over now. Walking the streets, wondering who is behind you . . . sitting alone at night, listening for every step on the stair. He's got very little time left now, and he's got to *do* something. The question is — what's he going to do?

BETTY: Maybe he didn't mean it. Maybe he only meant to scare you.

PENDEREL: And lose all that money? You don't know my stepfather.

BETTY: Listen!

PENDEREL: I — I don't hear anything.

BETTY: That's just it. There's no sound of running water. The boats have stopped.

PENDEREL: Then we're all alone in here. Or with him.

BETTY: Yes.

PENDEREL: Lord, how I wish I hadn't made that silly bet! You know, I thought I saw him in the crowd outside. But I wasn't sure. I see him everywhere.

BETTY: Bob, tell me something. Did you ever see Mr. Destry — I mean, face to face — after that first night?

PENDEREL: Many times.

BETTY: He came to see you?

PENDEREL: He came to my laboratory once, yes. But mostly, I went to see him. And why? Because it was the only place in the world I could feel really safe.

BETTY: He promised nothing would happen to you while you were in his apartment?

PENDEREL: Don't you see it was part of the torture? Night after night he'd invite me — and I'd go to visit him. As a matter of fact, I saw him only last night. We were in that study of his, with the devil-masks on the walls. And he was sitting behind the big mahogany desk . . .

(*Flashback to*)

DESTRY: My dear Robert! I'm pleased and even touched to have you here on the last night before you . . . before you . . .

PENDEREL: Why don't you say *die* and get it over with?

DESTRY: Well! Let's not say die.

PENDEREL: No?

DESTRY: The clergy contend that we never die; we only change. Let that be a consolation to you. And must you be going so early?

PENDEREL: There's that 'one hour at home,' you remember.

DESTRY: I remember. You're keeping to the rules?

PENDEREL: (*Fiercely*) Keeping to the rules? I mean to beat you at this if it's the last thing I ever do!

DESTRY: (*Reflectively*) 'The last thing I ever do.' That's an unfortunate choice of phrase, Robert. My boy, you haven't a chance. Something is going to happen to you within the next twenty-four hours, when you least expect it.

PENDEREL: Will you answer one question?

DESTRY: If I choose.

PENDEREL: Have you decided *how* you mean to kill me?

DESTRY: I decided that six months ago.

PENDEREL: And you still think you can get away with it?

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DESTRY: It's a method which has never been known to fail. I give you my word of honor on that.

PENDEREL: Is it — sudden?

DESTRY: (*Thoughtfully*) Yes . . . and no.

PENDEREL: Good night, Mr. Destry. I think I'd better be leaving.

DESTRY: No, my dear boy! No! You musn't go yet. Sit down and pour yourself a glass of brandy.

PENDEREL: No, thanks.

DESTRY: Then perhaps you wouldn't mind pouring a glass for *me?* (*Rattle of glass against glass*) I notice your hands are shaking. They didn't six months ago, did they? No. You were full of confidence then. And it grieves me to see you waste tobacco by lighting a cigarette and then putting it out immediately.

PENDEREL: It's no use lying to you. But I'm going to beat you just the same.

DESTRY: You wouldn't like to back out now?

PENDEREL: After what I've been through?

DESTRY: You'd still have your life.

PENDEREL: I'll keep it, thanks.

DESTRY: That's very unwise of you, Robert. Still, it is you who must decide. I was expecting my secretary a little later, to dictate some letters. But now I think I'll leave her a message that I've gone to bed. Tomorrow is likely to prove an interesting day for both of us. Here's your hat . . . your briefcase . . . and let me wish you a fond, peaceful, and happy night.

(*Back to The Haunted Mill*)

PENDEREL: That was last night, Betty, and only five hours to go . . .

BETTY: Less than five hours now.

PENDEREL: If I can keep away from the old devil until nine o'clock . . .

BETTY: I wish those boats would start running again!

PENDEREL: Why?

BETTY: Because it's almost as spooky in here as in a real mill. And even that wax dummy on the straw — at any minute, now . . .

PENDEREL: You're expecting to see it move? So am I.

BETTY: Don't stand up!

PENDEREL: It doesn't matter. If the boats aren't running, we can hear anybody who comes along.

BETTY: I hope so.

PENDEREL: Do you think Destry got in?

BETTY: Bob, he couldn't have!

PENDEREL: Why not?

BETTY: Because today Mr. Destry intended to . . . (*Stops dead*)

PENDEREL: Go on, Betty, go on. How do *you* know what Mr. Destry intended to do?

BETTY: Because I'm his secretary. I was going to tell you. (*Pause*)

PENDEREL: You know, Betty, I'm sorry it was you who did this.

BETTY: Did what?

PENDEREL: You can't guess?

BETTY: (*Crying out*) I didn't come here to trap you or spy on you, if that's what you're thinking. I swear I didn't!

PENDEREL: No. You only got me to tell you all and lose my bet.

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BETTY: I haven't heard a single word you've said, Bob Penderel. Please believe that!

PENDEREL: He didn't send you here?

BETTY: No! No!

PENDEREL: And you didn't see me at his apartment last night?

BETTY: No, I swear I didn't! I got there late. He'd gone to bed. I didn't even take off my hat or gloves before I left again. Don't you understand, Bob? I hate him, and . . . I rather like *you*. I want to see you beat him! You've got to beat him!

PENDEREL: You mean that?

BETTY: Look at me and see if I mean it!

PENDEREL: Betty, I almost believe you.

(*Slapping and splashing of water*)

BETTY: We'd better hide — the boats have started up again. Come on — hurry!

(*A man's voice shouts from a little distance*)

VOICE: Wait a minute, you two! Stay where you are!

PENDEREL: Where's that voice coming from?

BETTY: From back in the tunnel, I think.

PENDEREL: But it's not Destry's voice.

BETTY: No, it's a man standing up in a boat. He's coming around the bend. I can see him now.

(*Splashings and the bump of a boat*)

STRANGER: The Old Haunted Mill, eh? By golly, if *this* ain't some place to make a pinch, *I* never heard of one!

PENDEREL: What do you mean — make a pinch?

STRANGER: Just what I said. Your name Robert Penderel?

PENDEREL: Yes. Who are you, and what do you want?

STRANGER: I'm from Police Headquarters. You're to come along with me. They want to see you over in New York.

BETTY: About . . . what?

STRANGER: I wouldn't know, lady. But it *might* be about the murder of John Destry. (*Brassy laughter*) Sweet howling catfish, what was that?

PENDEREL: Did you say the *murder* of John Destry?

STRANGER: That's right. Somebody poisoned him last night with mercury cyanide. I wouldn't have got on your trail at all, if the barker outside hadn't thought the cops was after you to start with.

PENDEREL: Betty.

BETTY: Yes, Bob?

PENDEREL: He's beaten me. I know now the weapon Destry planned to use in killing me.

BETTY: What weapon?

PENDEREL: The electric chair. It never fails.

BETTY: You mustn't *talk* like that!

PENDEREL: Don't you see? He never once intended to kill me in the way I thought.

STRANGER: Are you comin' quietly, Mr. Penderel.

PENDEREL: He poisoned himself. But

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he left evidence to show *I* did it. He's killed me just as effectively as if he'd used a gun. The money doesn't matter now. If I'm in the death house for murder, what use would I have for all the money in the world?

(*Inspector Mullan is fiftyish; he has a gruff voice, patient and almost friendly*)

MULLAN: Mr. Penderel, let me introduce myself. My name's Mullan. Inspector Mullan.

PENDEREL: (*Sardonically*) It's a pleasure to meet you, Inspector. It's a pleasure to be — safe again.

MULLAN: I've had you brought to my office for a quiet little talk. You're in a jam, son, and I want you to realize how bad it is.

PENDEREL: You think I don't realize it?

MULLAN: John Destry was poisoned with mercury cyanide administered in a glass of brandy. . . .

PENDEREL: And only my fingerprints were on the glass besides his own.

MULLAN: Mr. Destry's body was found this morning, lying behind the desk in the study. There was an empty glass, with traces of brandy and cyanide. We haven't had the full autopsy report, but the smell of that stuff is pretty distinctive. They tell me you're a chemist, Mr. Penderel.

PENDEREL: That's right.

MULLAN: The boys find that eight grains of mercury cyanide are missing from your laboratory.

PENDEREL: Where he visited me a month ago.

MULLAN: And in your brief case, which you took away from his apartment last night.

PENDEREL: He handed it to me . . .

MULLAN: . . . We found over a thousand dollars in cash. Now take a look at this note. Ever see it before?

PENDEREL: Yes. I wrote it.

MULLAN: It says, "I am a failure, and this was the only way out. I wouldn't have done it otherwise."

PENDEREL: Where did you find it?

MULLAN: Torn up in little bits. You started to write a confession, then couldn't face the consequences. But you shouldn't have left the pieces. You're in for it, my lad. Too bad you had to go and kill him, son. Didn't you know he had an aneurism — a fatal heart disease?

PENDEREL: He said he had heart trouble. But . . .

MULLAN: Heart trouble! His doctor says he couldn't have lived more than eight or ten months. And you might have got something in the will.

PENDEREL: So *that's* why he did it!

MULLAN: Did what?

PENDEREL: Killed himself.

MULLAN: You still stick to that crazy story you told the boys?

PENDEREL: He's *going* to kill me, isn't he? With three thousand volts of electricity?

(*Sharp rapping on the door, which opens*)

MULLAN: (*Angrily*) What are you

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doing, Sergeant? Didn't I say I wasn't to be disturbed?

SERGEANT: All the same, Inspector, I thought I'd better do it. There's a young lady here — a Miss Betty Andrews. I think you'd better see her. We've just heard from Mr. Destry's lawyer.

MULLAN: Well?

SERGEANT: He says that young fellow there, Mr. Penderel, inherits twenty-five thousand bucks in Mr. Destry's new will.

MULLAN: Do you hear that, son? Do you see what you'd have got, if you hadn't gone and killed him?

PENDEREL: He was "keeping his promise," that's all. And a fine lot of good it'll do me now!

SERGEANT: But look, Inspector. I've just talked to the medical examiner. And he says there's no poison in Mr. Destry's body. (*Pause*)

MULLAN: Somebody's kidding you! An empty glass with the smell of mercury cyanide, and a dead man with a congested face behind the desk. . . . What *did* kill him?

SERGEANT: If you'd like to talk to Miss Andrews, Inspector, she's right here.

BETTY: I think you'd better, Inspector. I've been trying to tell you all afternoon.

MULLAN: Come in, Miss Andrews.

BETTY: I've been over and over it! But until they got the medical report, nobody would listen.

MULLAN: Can you tell us what killed John Destry?

BETTY: Yes. Poison.

MULLAN: But the Sergeant just said there was no poison in the body!

BETTY: Inspector, *will* you listen? I was at Mr. Destry's apartment late last night. The servants said he'd gone to bed. I looked into the study, to see if there were any instructions.

PENDEREL: You didn't see . . . ?

BETTY: I couldn't see his body, because it was hidden behind the desk. I didn't even know he was dead until late this afternoon! But I did see a full glass of brandy.

MULLAN: A *full* glass, did you say?

BETTY: Yes! So I picked up the glass and poured the brandy back into the decanter. That's what he always did himself. And I didn't leave any fingerprints because I was still wearing my gloves. And that was the same glass you later found empty.

MULLAN: But you're still not telling us! *What was the poison that killed John Destry?*

BETTY: The poison of his own character. Don't you see? He worked out this plot to frame Bob Penderel. Only, just as he stretched out his hand to drink the cyanide . . .

PENDEREL: Inspector, I think I see it! It was his last great moment — he sat there gloating —

BETTY: That's it! His bad heart couldn't stand it, and he fell dead behind the desk. And from the expression on his face now . . .

MULLAN: Yes?

BETTY: I think he died laughing.

(*Music up*)

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BURIED TREASURE DEPT.: *Miser's Gold*

by ELLERY QUEEN

IT IS DOUBTFUL IF THE MASTER WHO created Baghdad-on-the-Subway ever produced a more wonderful entertainment than the tale of Uncle Malachi. The atmosphere is rich and twisted, the subject likewise, and the story full of sentiment and irony. It even has a surprise ending.

Uncle Malachi was born, he lived, and he died under the rusty shadows of the Third Avenue "El." Because he was a pawnbroker and owned the rickety, peeling old building in which he worked and lived, he was said to be Wealthy. Because he was an old crosspatch who distrusted banks and lived like a mouse, he was said to be a Miser. And since his one notable passion was the collecting of books — not rare books, or first editions, or books in perfect condition, but any books in any condition — he was said to be Queer.

It was all true — he was rich, he was a miser, and he was queer; but there was more to it than that. His riches came from selling real estate — Manhattan real estate — which his great-grandfather had bought; he was a miser, because all pawnbrokers are born accumulators; and his queerness lay not in collecting books but in reading them.

Books swarmed like honey bees over his pawnshop and living quarters upstairs, which consisted of two impossibly cluttered cubbyholes. Here under jackets of dust could be found the collected works of such as Dumas, Scott, Cooper, Dickens, Poe, Stevenson, Kipling, Conrad, Twain, O. Henry, Doyle, Wells, Jack London — wholesale reading in low-cost lots; and Malachi devoted every moment he could spare from his shop to peering through wavering gaslight at the written treasures of the world. As he aged and eyesight withered, the tempo of his reading increased; for old Malachi had set himself the fine labor of reading every famous book ever printed, beginning with the more exciting ones. A magnificent lunacy, which went with his spidery mind and mystifying sense of humor — he was always grinning, chuckling, or laughing, although no one ever knew what the joke was.

Uncle Malachi's clients were fond of saying that the old miser had no heart, which was a slander. He had a heart — as Dr. Ben Bernard, whose shingle drooped two doors up the street, was prepared to testify — one of the worst hearts, Dr. Ben said, in his experience, a valvular monstrosity and black as the devil's. But Uncle Malachi only cackled. "You're a fool,

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Doctor!" Dr. Ben retorted with a sigh that if he were not a fool he would not be practicing medicine on Third Avenue, and he continued to treat the old pawnbroker as if his monthly bills were honored.

As for Eve Warren, she came into Uncle Malachi's life the way most people did. Eve was struggling to keep her little greeting-card shop and circulating library across the street from the hot clutch of her creditors, so she became one of Malachi's clients. When his eyes failed, she felt a stern duty; there were few enough book-lovers in the world. So she began dropping in on him after closing her shop, and she would read to him. At first he was suspicious; but when he saw that she was a fool like Dr. Ben, old Malachi grinned, and after that he would even offer her with antique ceremony a cup of strong hot water which he alleged was tea.

Uncle Malachi's black heart cut its last caper one evening while Eve was reading *Treasure Island* to him. She looked up from Black Dog's wound and Dr. Livesey's lancet to find the pawnbroker on the floor, his head between two heaps of books, eyes popping and face blue-twisted.

"Lawyer . . . witnesses . . . will . . ."

Frankie Pagluighi, who was serving his first clerkship in a Murray Hill law office, was holding forth on the stoop next door to a group of neighbors on the latest Supreme Court decision; Eve screamed to him what was wanted and raced up the street to Dr. Ben's. By the time she and the young doctor got back, Uncle Malachi's head was resting on a red buckram set of Richard Harding Davis and Attorney Pagluighi was kneeling by his side, writing frantically.

". . . all my property, real and personal . . . including my hidden cash . . . equally between the only human beings . . . who have ever shown me Christian charity . . ."

Dr. Ben looked up at Eve and shook his head sadly.

". . . Eve Warren and Dr. Ben Bernard."

"Oh!" said Eve; and then she burst into tears.

Grocer Swendsen, Patrolman Pat Curlihy, and Joe Littman of the dry goods store signed as witnesses, and then Frankie Pagluighi bent over the gasping man and said loudly, "This hidden cash you specify. How much does it amount to?" Old Malachi worked his blue lips, but nothing came out. "Five thousand? Ten thousand?"

"Four million." He managed a whisper. "Inten-thousand-dollarbills."

"Million." The young lawyer swallowed. "Four *million?* Dollars? Where? Where is it? Where did you hide it? Mr. Malachi!"

Uncle Malachi tried to speak.

"*Is it in this building?*"

"Yes," said the old man in a suddenly clear voice. "Yes. It's in —"

But then he came to attention and looked far beyond them, and after a while Dr. Ben said he was dead.

Ellery came into the case not only

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because puzzles were his caviar, but also because it was clear as an aspic that his two callers were hopelessly gone on each other. Love and buried treasure — who could resist such a dish?

"You're sure it's really $4,000,000 and not 400 figments of the old man's imagination, Dr. Bernard?"

But Dr. Ben reassured him. In the pawnshop safe had been found a ledger listing the serial numbers of the 10,000-dollar bills, which various banks had confirmed. And Eve said Uncle Malachi had often made slyly mysterious remarks to her about his "cache of cash" — he was fond of puns and tricks, she said — defying anyone to find it, even though he had hidden it "on the premises." And the fact was she and Dr. Ben had gone over the little building from basement to roof, inside and out, and had found nothing but cobwebs and vermin. It was not a total loss, Eve admitted with a blush, for they had become engaged while digging up the cellar, under the sponsorship of an indignant rat which had sent her howling into Dr. Ben's arms.

"Well, well, we'll see about this," said Ellery delightedly; and he went right back to Third Avenue with them.

Sixteen hours later he sank into Uncle Malachi's only chair, a betasseled red plush refugee from some Victorian town house, and nibbled his thumb. Eve perched disconsolately on Uncle Malachi's bed, and Dr. Ben sat on a pile of books, wedged between The Works of Bret Harte and The Complete Novels of Wilkie Collins. And the gas jet flamed and danced.

"It isn't as if," said Ellery about an hour later, "it isn't as if you could hide 400 banknotes in a . . . unless . . . "

"Unless he separated them. One here, one there," said Dr. Ben helpfully. "Four hundred different hiding places."

Eve shook her head. "No, Ben. From hints he dropped to me, I'm sure he put them in one place, in a roll."

"Hints," said Ellery. "Hints, Miss Warren?"

"Oh, I don't know — cryptic remarks. About clues and things —"

"Clues!"

"Clues," gasped Eve guiltily. "Oh, dear!"

"He left a *clue?*"

"Think, Eve!" implored Dr. Ben. "It was right in this room. I was reading to him —"

"Reading what?" Ellery asked sharply.

"Something by Poe . . . oh, yes, *The Purloined Letter.* And Uncle Malachi laughed, and he said —"

"His exact words, if you can recall them!"

"He said: 'Clever rascal, that Dupin. The most obvious place, eh? Very good! Fact is, there's a clue to my hiding place, Evie, and it's in this very room — the clue, I mean, *not* the money.' And he held his sides laughing. 'In the most obvious place

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imaginable!' He laughed so hard I thought he'd have a heart attack."

"Clue in the most obvious place in this room . . . Books. He must have meant in one of these thousands of books. But which one!" Ellery stared at Eve. Then he sprang from the chair. "Puns and tricks, you'd said. Of course . . ." And he began hunting wildly among the mountains and valleys of books, toppling volumes like a landslide. "But he's *got* to be here . . . Why, Doctor. You're sitting on him!"

Dr. Ben leaped from the Uniform Edition on which he had been seated as if it had suddenly wiggled.

Ellery dropped to his knees, shuffling through the various books of the set. "Ah!" And he sat down on the floor with one of the volumes, clutching it like a roc's egg. First he explored the binding with the tip of his nose. Then he went through it page by page. Finally he turned back to one of the front pages and read it to himself, mumbling.

When he looked up, Eve and Dr. Ben cried in one voice: "Well?"

"I'm going to ask some questions. Kindly refrain from hilarity and answer as if your future depended on it — which it does." Ellery consulted the page. "Is there a potted palm anywhere in or about the premises?"

"Potted palm?" said Dr. Ben feebly.

"No," said Eve, bewildered.

"No potted palm. How about a room with a skylight?"

"Skylight . . ."

"*No.*"

"In that art stuff downstairs — ceramics, statuettes, vases — do you recall any object in the shape of, or illustrated with the picture of, a dog? A yellow dog?"

"Now there's a blue horse," began Dr. Ben, "with a chipped —"

"No, Mr. Queen!"

"Bows and arrows? Archery target? Picture or statue of an archer? Or a statue of Cupid? Or a door painted green?"

"Not one of those things, Mr. Queen!"

"Clocks," murmured Ellery, glancing again at the book.

"Say," said Dr. Ben. "Dozens of 'em!"

"And I've examined them all," said Ellery, "and none of them conceals the hoard. That being the case," and Ellery got to his feet, smiling, "and Uncle Malachi having been fond of his little joke, only one possibility remains. So that's where he stashed his treasure!"

CHALLENGE TO THE READER: *In which book was Malachi's clue and how did it tell where he had hidden his money?*

"Swiping a leaf from Malachi's rule-of-the-obvious," continued Ellery, "in which of these thousands of books could his clue be hidden? Well, what was the nature of his treasure? Four million dollars. Four million — book. And among these standard sets is the complete works of O. Henry. And one of O. Henry's most famous

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books is entitled . . . *The Four Million.*" Ellery waved the volume. "I found nothing foreign in the book. Then the clue was in its contents. Obvious development: see Contents Page. And the titles of the various stories? *Tobin's Palm* — so I asked about a potted palm. *The Skylight Room* — but no skylight. *Memoirs of a Yellow Dog* — no yellow dog. *Mammon and the Archer* — *The Green Door* — *The Caliph* — *Cupid and the Clock:* all fizzled. Only one other possibility among the stories, so that must be Malachi's clue to the hiding place of the cash. *Between Rounds.*"

"*Between Rounds,*" said Dr. Ben, biting his nails. "How the deuce does that tell you anything? Malachi wasn't a prizefighter, or a —"

"But he was," smiled Ellery, "a punster and high priest of the obscurely obvious. Rounds. . . . A round is anything that's circular or spherical in shape. What in a pawnshop — in any and every pawnshop! — is spherical and large enough to conceal 400 banknotes?" Eve gasped and ran to the front window. From its rusty arm, which pointed accusingly at the Third Avenue "El," hung the ancient emblem of Uncle Malachi's profession.

"If you'll please find me some tools, Doctor, we'll open those three gilt balls!"

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly paced mystery-thrillers, all MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "The Wrong Body," by Anthony Gilbert. Abridged edition. ". . . ingenuity and suspense . . ." says *The New Yorker.*

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A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "Operation Manhunt" (formerly "Alias Uncle Hugo"), by Manning Coles. "Lively," comments the *Saturday Review.*

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

James C. Brough's "President Sam Houston: Detective" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest. It is a particularly interesting and imaginative tale to have been written "the first time [as the author advised us] I ever tried my hand at detective fiction." The author was born in Houston, and has lived there most of his life. He is in his early forties, married, has two daughters, and for the past decade has been a reporter and city desk man on "The Houston Chronicle." Houston — the city, "The Chronicle," and Sam — all are in Mr. Brough's blood . . .

For a long time Mr. Brough felt — and rightfully — that mystery-story writers have overlooked a good bet in the character of Sam Houston — a man, as Mr. Brough reminds, recognized to have been something of a superman, which (Mr. Brough reminds us again) a detective-story hero should be. The plot of Mr. Brough's story is, of course, fiction, although it is obvious that the author has gone to considerable pains and trouble to check on matters of locale and known historical fact; the paragraph in the "Telegraph and Register," for example, did actually appear in print. So, while Sam Houston is the only character in the story who ever really lived, while the incident in "his life" is purely apocryphal, Mr. Brough is convinced that Old Sam would have acted precisely as the author imagined him to . . .

PRESIDENT SAM HOUSTON: DETECTIVE

by JAMES C. BROUGH

TO AN INVETERATE READER OF detective stories there is strong appeal in a letter treasured by Albert Cordigan, who for many decades has dealt in rare and old books, and especially in those dealing with the history of Texas.

If the letter should be authentic (and Mr. Cordigan makes no representation that it is), it reveals a heretofore unpublicized side of that great man, General Sam Houston — President of the Republic of Texas, Governor of the State of Tennessee, Governor of the State of Texas, member of the United States Senate, at one

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time considered a possible candidate to oppose Abraham Lincoln for the Presidency of the United States, and an idealist with the courage of his convictions until his death.

The letter appears to have been written by one John Hendricks to his patron or superior in London. Apparently it was slipped into the wall of the then unfinished City Hotel in Houston for safekeeping until it could be mailed, and for some reason it was neither posted nor recovered. Such is the explanation of Mr. Cordigan, who refuses to tell how the letter came into his possession.

The City Hotel, built in the year 1837, fell down of decay in 1855. The Southern Pacific Railroad offices now stand where this first hotel of Houston once housed the visitor from England.

The name of the presumably high official of the British Empire to whom the letter was to have gone had not been affixed.

It was written at a time when far-seeing Britons, through unofficial delegates, were wooing with some encouragement the money-poor but potentially rich Republic of Texas. But the letter best speaks for itself:

My Lord:

Six months ago, when your attention was attracted by statements, republished from American newspapers by the press of England, concerning the revolt of the province of Texas from the Republic of Mexico, and when your Lordship directed me to immediately visit this Republic under your oral orders, I was convinced that I was coming to a land of anarchy.

Such a belief was natural, considering the temper of the articles which were accepted unquestionably by the British press as a reflection of the true state of American affairs. These outpourings of vituperation, however, appear to have been inspired by the prejudices of the anti-slavery party in the United States. These prejudices, together with lack of any specific constitutional authority for the President of the United States to annex another sovereign territory to the United States, I am now convinced are largely responsible for the fact that the Republic of Texas is still a *de facto* sovereign government, rather than another State of the American Union.

Although the war with Mexico continues, there have been no actual hostilities since the Battle of San Jacinto, at which the forces under General Sam Houston secured a decisive victory over the Mexicans.

President Santa Anna, captured during that battle despite his superior forces, remains a prisoner of the Republic of Texas. Thus, even though no foreign power has yet recognized the sovereignty of Texas, its citizens enjoy complete independence. This independence is individual as well as political, and the liberties which the common people take would be alarming were it not for the strong leader-

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ship which they have placed at the head of their nation.

I have now spent ten hours in the inland port of Houston, the capital at Texas, which is located thirty-five miles upstream on Buffalo Bayou, at the head of navigation on that stream, in Harrisburg County.

The appearance of the rough village, made up as it is of log cabins, wooden houses, and muddy streets is certainly unprepossessing, but during the short time since my arrival I have nevertheless witnessed an occurrence sufficient to convince me that Texas is headed by men peculiarly adapted to the task of transforming a rich, wild country into an orderly one.

I refer particularly to President Houston, that same man who commanded the Texan forces at San Jacinto, which is only a matter of 20 miles downstream on Buffalo Bayou from Houston — the man in whose honor this town has been named.

In a later report I shall give the details of my arrival in Quebec, and of my journey through the United States to Texas. But while it is yet fresh in my memory I should like to relate to you a most remarkable feat of mental agility on the part of President Houston, along with as clear a word-picture as I can give of the manner in which he conducts himself among his people. It enables me to understand how this man, with only a handful of settlers to form his army, could repel the armies of Mexico which were under the command of a seasoned General.

May I here interpolate that when President Houston learned of my mission he was extremely cordial, arranging for my lodging in the City Hotel, which is no small matter in this settlement, where many sleep in tents and in the flimsiest structures. The President has permitted also my constant attendance at his side.

It was 2 o'clock this afternoon when I arrived by the steamboat *Elvira*, Captain Ralph Rawcett commanding. The rough wooden wharves were lined with crude shelters for bales of cotton. There were two sloops tied up at the wharf, about twenty feet apart, so that ours made the third.

As we approached I noticed that there was great excitement on the dock. A large crowd of men were milling about, most of them dressed in homespun, all in boots and wearing sidearms and knives, as (I have since learned) is customary here. As soon as it was possible, Captain Rawcett and I leaped to the wharf to determine the cause of the disturbance. Our answer was quickly had. Upon the planking lay a man with a knife in his chest. He was dead.

I looked up from this spectacle on hearing the sound of a galloping horse, and I had my first view of the President. Houston was handsomely mounted on a beautiful bay gelding, which he reined in sharply before he leaped to the ground at the edge of the wharf. He tossed the reins to a Negro and came striding through a path which was opened for him. His step was broken by a slight limp, the

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result of a wound suffered at San Jacinto. Paying no attention to the blood on the planks, he knelt beside the dead man, soiling his stylish frock coat. Then he rose, swept the crowd with piercing eyes, and stepped over to a wooden post in which was buried another knife. Both knives, I have learned, are of the type here known as Bowie knives. Bowie knives are some 10 inches long, and sharp as razors.

"Who is the owner of this knife?" the President asked.

There was no answer.

"Did any of you men see this man killed?"

At this a roughly dressed man stepped forward.

"I seen it," he said. "But I don't know who done it. I was settin' on that bale of cotton —" he indicated a bale some three feet from the body — "and talkin' to Henry, when Henry jumped up and reached for his gun. But he fell down before he got it out. All I seen was the knife going in him with a thud. I looked around right quick and couldn't see nobody, so I done what I could for Henry, but he was a goner.

"Reckon," the man added laconically, "that other knife was for me. I'll give ten dollars to anybody lets me know who throwed it."

(I am attempting here, My Lord, to give the man's speech as accurately as I can recall the strange wording).

A heavy man in seafaring garb next spoke up.

"I can verify part of his story, Sir," he said. "I am Captain Dawson of the sloop *Heritage*, and my crew of two men and I were in the cabin when I heard a man cry out, 'My God!' We came immediately to determine the cause, account of the alarm in his voice, and found this man inspecting the body of Mr. Burgess. Mr. Burgess was dead when I reached him, only a moment after I heard the cry."

"His name is Henry Burgess?" President Houston asked.

The captain nodded. "He is watchman at the dock, and a fine and friendly man he was," he replied. "I can't imagine him getting into a quarrel with any right-thinking man. You know, Mr. President, there was some cotton-stealing until he was made watchman about two weeks ago."

President Houston's face hardened perceptibly. "Who was aboard the other ship?"

"I was the only one aboard her," answered a slight, graying, sharp-nosed man, who I noticed wore only a shirt and trousers, while his shoes were unlaced. "I was asleep, and didn't wake up until I heard the crowd out here."

"Your name?" the President asked.

"Captain Bailey of the *Ruth*," the man answered. (It will strike you as curious, My Lord, that although Captain Bailey was only partly dressed and his hair still rumpled as from being a-bed, he had a pistol thrust in his belt, as well as a knife.)

The President, as though by accident, swept back his coat, revealing a holstered firearm.

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"I am about to use a word I seldom use, but always mean when I do use it," he said. "Some one of you gentlemen is a liar. This man was facing the water. The knife which killed him therefore came from the direction of the water, as obviously did the knife in yonder post. There is no place that the murderer could have hidden except in one of these boats, unless he was seen by Burgess's friend here running for cover immediately after his dastardly deed. Will the killer confess, like a man, and give whatever reason he had for killing this man, or will he further play the part of the coward?"

There was an angry reddening of faces, a glint in the eye of every man to whom he spoke.

"There can't nobody call me a liar, Sam Houston!" declared the man who had witnessed the killing. His name, I subsequently learned, was Carl Watson, and he certainly appeared to be a savage character. But the independent nature of his statement well illustrates a typical attitude among inhabitants of this country. I am told that if one of the three men had immediately killed the President for his words, the deed would doubtless have gone unpunished, as justified by the insult. Such is the courage required of a leader here.

The President did not further inflame Watson. He smiled in a friendly way, although without any appearance of apology.

"I did not say you are a liar, my friend," he said. "I said that some one of the statements made here is a lie. You offered ten dollars for the name of the man who threw that knife in the post. I will add five hundred to it. Once more I ask the killer to step forward, before I determine — by the simple expedient of sighting along the blade and handle of the knife in the post — which vessel the knife was thrown from."

There was still no answer to his request. President Houston stepped over to the knife, sighted along it, executed a smart about-face, and then frowned. He was facing the space between the two boats. According to his theory the knife had been thrown from the water, some fifteen feet below its position in the post.

It was only an instant before the crowd of rough men caught the point; then they burst out in a callous mirth that ignored both the tragedy which had occurred and the dignity of the President.

"Come on up out of that bayou water," one man cried out derisively, "or Sam'll git ye!"

Thus I had an opportunity to observe this Republic's leader under ridicule. With never an instant's hesitation, he turned, laughed with the rest, without a sign of resentment clapped one of the men on the shoulder, and said soberly, "Ben, have the sexton remove poor Burgess's body, and you notify his family, will you?" Then he swept off his hat, tossed a twenty-dollar gold piece into it, and held out the huge headpiece by its rolled brim.

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"We must send the Widow Burgess the means of sustenance through her period of grief and tribulation, gentlemen," he said solemnly.

In a short space he had collected three hundred dollars. From the moment he had clapped the man he called "Ben" on the back, the President was again in firm control of the situation.

If you should think, My Lord, that this vulgar attitude ill becomes a ruler, pray bear in mind that this one rules a people so far from the proper servility of the English Commoner that they can ridicule their President and chief military hero to his very face. Whilst they recognize him as a great man, none will admit that he is a better man than any other.

The President counted the money and handed it to the man named Ben; and then, with the people once more on his side, he executed a surprising maneuver, of a type I am told he takes pleasure in, both in politics and war. He is a man of surprises.

Stepping over to the man Watson, who had been the only witness to the death of Mr. Burgess, President Houston quickly drew his pistol and presented it at Watson's breast.

"As head of the enforcement agencies of the Republic of Texas, I arrest you for the murder of Henry Burgess," the President announced, in a voice that carried to every ear on the wharf. There was a gasp of surprise, and then a murmur of resentment. This time there was no yielding on the part of the President. He simply held up his left hand, and he ordered, "Quiet!"

And quiet fell.

"This man will have a fair trial," the President continued sternly. "But before I make any explanation, he will be removed to the new gaol."

At this Watson, despite the President's pistol, reached for his knife. What happened thereafter was done so quickly that I was transfixed with astonishment. Sufficient to say, my Lord, that instead of shooting the man, President Houston in the twinkling of an eye had lifted him high and hurled him to the ground. Then he quickly took Watson's weapons from him, jerked him upright, and put him into the hands of two of the men standing by.

"Take him to the gaol, and remain there as guards until you are relieved," he said. "I deputize you as agents of the Republic." Whereupon he calmly returned his pistol to its holster and, holding Watson's pistol and knife loosely in his left hand, he stepped up to the knife in the post.

"Since it is impossible for this knife to have come from either ship," he announced, "it must obviously have come from some person not on either ship. The only man here at the time who was not aboard a ship was Watson. Therefore he is the murderer."

"Damned if Sam Houston ain't right!" one of the men exclaimed.

"Let's hang Watson!" another shouted. If Watson had still been present, the crowd might forthwith have executed him. The President,

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however, had delayed sufficiently for Watson and his guards to be well on their way to the gaol.

Now the President raised his hand again.

"We have courts to handle such affairs," he said. "When you believed him innocent, I said he would have a fair trial. Now that you believe him guilty, he shall have a fair trial also!"

"Provided the gaol don't burn down tonight," another man exclaimed. "Ain't no way to get in or out of it except through that trap door in the roof, and them pine logs would burn mighty fine."

"We'll have none of that," the President retorted. "Besides, this man Watson must be questioned in court, for I believe him to be simply an agent. And now," President Houston continued, "I want the captains of these two vessels to submit to a test."

"If it is reasonable, I'm willing," Captain Dawson replied. "But mind, Sir, that you make no accusations you cannot prove against me!"

"I direct each of you to throw a knife at a mark, as well as you are able," the President replied. He pointed to a bit of mud on the side of the cotton bale nearby, stepped fifteen paces away, and put the knife neatly through the spot.

"That, gentlemen, is what I mean by 'as well as you can'," he said. "There shouldn't be a seaman or a Texan unable to duplicate my throw."

Captain Dawson shook his head. "I can't do that," he said. "But I can throw a knife well enough." He picked up the knife and weighed it in his hand. "I can do better with my own knife."

The President shook his head.

"You are to use that one," he said. "If you will, please."

Dawson missed the mark by five inches. The crew members from Captain Dawson's ship, both burly specimens with their forearms tattooed below their rolled-up sleeves, then volunteered to throw, and each missed by some five inches, also. Then the President turned to Captain Bailey, who made his throw without comment and missed by three inches.

"I thank you, gentlemen," the President said. "And I sincerely hope that further investigation does not show one of you to be an excellent marksman with a knife."

The sexton had now arrived to remove Burgess's body, the crowd began to disperse, and President Houston moved to his horse. It was at this point that I stepped forward and introduced myself to him, simply stating, because of the public nature of our encounter, that I had a letter to deliver to him from an important English official. His prompt consideration is gratifying for its political significance, as well as for my personal convenience.

He procured for me a fine horse — a matter of great importance because of the muddy condition of the streets — and personally conducted me over the town, taking especial pride in showing me the new Capitol Build-

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ing which is being constructed at the northwest corner of Main Street and Texas Avenue. This building is at the extreme south of the town, with nothing but prairie beyond for a considerable distance, and a wooded area bordering the prairie.

During the tour I complimented him upon his prompt solution of the murder mystery.

"Sir," he said, "you are obviously a man who can keep his counsel, or you would not be on your present mission. Watson, I am convinced, did not kill Burgess. The mystery is far from solved. I have merely laid an ambush."

The President made me his guest, in company with a number of prominent men of the Republic, at dinner in the town's only hotel, which is not yet completed. I was astounded at the excellence of the fare. The reason for the availability of fine wines and other imported delicacies is that this is a port town. Prices are high, and I learned that the dinner we were served cost a fabulous amount — fowls at $6 a pair; butter at $1 a pound; eggs at $3 a dozen. The cost of the champagne I did not learn. There was also venison, and numerous vegetables were served of which the land here is extremely productive.

During the conversation I was given an enlightening recapitulation of the events which led up to the formation of the Republic, and its growth and development since it was established, of which I shall report in detail in a later epistle. My reason for speeding this letter is that Captain Dawson is leaving in a few hours, and will carry my letter with him as far as New Orleans.

I shall, however, mention that the failure of the United States Congress to act on the proposed annexation of Texas has resulted in widespread coolness here toward that nation.

I had the gratification, during the repast, of seeing the President call for writing materials and pen a paragraph to be included in his message to be delivered to the Congress, and I feel that my arrival may have influenced it. Its express simplicity, and yet its far-reaching implications, well illustrate the statesmanlike qualities of the President. I cannot be sure that the statement will be delivered as written, but this is what he wrote at dinner, employing a most beautiful script:

"England has not disregarded our situation this far, nor can we believe from the indications already manifested by her, that she is to regard our prosperity with unkind feelings of suspicion or indifference."

The President also informed me that the constitution of the Republic provides that the common law of England, with modifications adapted to the requirements of Texas, is to be adopted as the basic law of the Republic.

Although President Houston abhors the traffic in slaves, there is a rumor that Texas is to import large numbers of the blacks, and this may further alienate the Republic from

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the anti-slave States which are so influential in the United States. I also have reason to believe, from the President's conversation at dinner, that he would welcome a policing of the Gulf of Mexico by British men-of-war, particularly in view of the deplorably weak state of the Texas navy.

During this conversation we were rudely interrupted by news that the new gaol was on fire.

We rushed at once to the scene, dismounted from our horses, and found there was no hope of saving the building or rescuing the prisoner. The pine logs sent a blaze forty feet into the air, being fanned by a gusty breeze which blew from the Gulf of Mexico, some fifty miles away.

The President spoke quietly to two men, and they galloped away. Ten minutes later they returned with a third man, who was under arrest.

It was Captain Bailey.

"We caught them in the act," one of the deputies reported to the President. "Two crew members are being held aboard the sloop. They had four bales of cotton aboard, and were obviously stealing a cargo while everybody in town was at the fire."

I had been surprised that Captain Bailey was mounted. I should have thought a prisoner would be treated with less consideration and I ascribed it to the habits of the country. Therein I was wrong.

"You were brought here ahorse," the President said to Bailey, "for a purpose. This afternoon your boots were clean, as were those same trousers. How came they so muddy? By wading to this place and setting fire to the gaol, in order to close the mouth of your accomplice in murder?"

At this point there was a loud noise as the roof of the gaol, made of logs also, collapsed in its center. Quick as a flash, Captain Bailey was away, galloping his horse perilously close to the flaming structure, apparently trying to put it between himself and us.

One of the men levelled a pistol, but before he could fire a blazing timber fell and caught the Captain on the shoulder, sweeping him to the ground and pinning him there. The horse escaped, but the man's shrieks were terrifying.

A bucket brigade, which had formed but been found useless against the blazing pine logs, quickly put out the fire in the single log, removed it, and carried the Captain a safe distance from the fire.

President Houston knelt in the mud by the seaman's side.

"Sir," the President said, "you have inhaled the flames, and you cannot hope to live. How can you make your peace with God unless you admit your grievous sin? Confess that it was you who set this cabin afire!"

The Captain nodded. "I did it," he said. "I lacked the money to take on a full cargo. I paid Watson fifty dollars, and he was to have thrown the knife into the post so as to point to the other boat. His throw was wrong."

"And you threw the knife that

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killed Burgess?" the President said, his voice still stern.

The Captain gasped, "I did. And I wish that I did not have Watson's burning on my soul."

The President's face now lost its harshness, and was all pity.

"You did not kill Watson," he said. "I had Watson removed to another place, for I feared someone might attempt to burn the gaol. That is why I made sure to mention that Watson would be fully questioned at his trial — to drive fear into his accomplice and force his hand. Watson will be tried as accomplice to murder."

"Why," Bailey asked, "did you have us throw the knives!"

"To make you think," the President replied, "that I depended on such evidence."

The true quality of the President, in its finest aspects, was then shown as he attended the dying murderer on his bed of mud.

"Have you a family?"

Captain Bailey nodded. "A wife and daughter, in New Orleans," he said. "God knows what will become of them. Will my sloop be confiscated?"

The President shook his head. "I have offered five hundred dollars for the name of Watson's murderer," he said. "You have just given me that information, and thus are entitled to the money. I shall see that your sloop is cargoed, using these funds, and that it is manned, brought to New Orleans, sold with cargo, and the money put into the hands of Mrs. Bailey."

"God bless you, Sir," murmured Bailey, and he died comforted.

Such is the leader, My Lord, who has convinced me that his young nation cannot fail to become a great one, or a part of some great nation; who knows which it shall be?

And now, My Lord, I must close, else I fail to catch the sloop with my letter. I remain

Your most humble and obedient servant,

ever grateful for Your Lordship's kindnesses,

John Hendricks

May 4, 1837

One can only suppose that Hendricks did fail to reach the sloop in time to mail his letter, and that the epistle was slipped into a crack in the wall of the hotel for safekeeping and could not be got out again.

The *Telegraph and Register* of Houston, in its May 9, 1837 issue, made no mention of the burning of the jail, or of the attempted theft of the cotton, but in its publication of President Houston's address to Congress may be found the paragraph which John Hendricks reported that he saw penned at dinner.

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Is there anyone in the mystery field who writes the emotional, human-interest cop story better than Thomas Walsh? We wonder . . . This is the story of a cop whose wife is having a baby. Sure, it happens every day — you've laughed at the antics of expectant fathers in the movies — but it's different when it happens to you . . .

THE NIGHT CALHOUN WAS OFF DUTY

by THOMAS WALSH

THEY COULDN'T HAVE BEEN IN BED more than an hour when Calhoun grew vaguely conscious that Ellen was shaking his arm. Although he heard her words and the labored way her breath was coming he woke slowly, as he always did, with the old odd feeling in his mind that it was scattered in many pieces and that he'd have to reach out for it bit by bit and put it together again before it would work for him. After he had mumbled the cab company's number into the phone and told them where to come he yawned and rolled his big red head between his hands. Then Ellen gasped again behind him and he sprang up, swearing at himself in an incandescent flare of anger.

He was a fool, Calhoun muttered savagely. He closed the windows, switched on the bureau lamp, and pattered out on bare feet to light the oven of the kitchen stove, so that she'd have something warm to dress by. Then he ran back to the bedroom and picked Ellen up as if she were no weight at all, cradling her in his arms.

"How is it?" he asked huskily. "Will I call Dr. Cotter? Will I get him over here?"

Ellen pressed her head against his shoulder. There was a pause in which he felt her body harden like a bar.

"Bring my clothes," she said at last, rather low. "Don't call him yet, John. They'll do that from the hospital. It's all right. It's — I'm glad it's started. I think it will be over soon."

"Sure," Calhoun chattered. "Sure it will." The kitchen light stung his eyes; he saw by the clock over the refrigerator that it was only four minutes past 11 and he stuttered trying to help her, trying to tell her that it wouldn't be bad. They had all kinds of stuff nowadays to give her. She'd probably never know anything about it until it was over.

"Yes," Ellen whispered. "Don't get so excited, John. My bag's in the hall closet, all packed. Put it by the door so that we can't forget it as we go out. And go and get dressed — I'll manage fine. We'll have to hurry to be downstairs when the cab comes for us."

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Calhoun hurried; he seemed to get his clothes on in a flash. Still, Ellen was ready when he came out — all he had to do was help her on with her coat. "All right," he said breathlessly. "Let's go." The shapeless old ulster that he liked better than his other coat because it was big and burly, because he could wear his revolver under it or even carry it in one of the pockets without its being noticed at all, was on a chair and he snatched it up. His gun and shield were on the bureau but he did not go inside for them. Calhoun wouldn't be on police duty tonight.

Ellen made him turn back to shut off the kitchen lights and she wouldn't let him carry her down the steps. In the vestibule he glanced at her and saw the desperate trembling fixity of her smile, the way small beads of perspiration kept appearing around the corners of her mouth. He could feel his heart throb like a rubber hammer swung up and down inside his ribs.

Presently the cab came and he had her out on the steps before the driver had a chance to honk. Then they were inside and starting off, but to Calhoun it was even worse than before, for now there was nothing to do until they got there, and her face, white and stiff under the dark rims about her eyes, made his words dry in his mouth.

"Is it bad?" he whispered, "Ellen —"

She shook her head as if she didn't want him to talk and then in a moment she seemed fine again.

"Who's having this baby?" she asked smiling at him. "Now I don't want you hanging around the hospital all night. Go home and get some sleep. They'll call you if anything happens. If you're there you'll only worry me."

"I'll wait a little while," Calhoun muttered. It was intolerable that she should think of him even now, when there was nothing he could do to help her. And suddenly he had a frightful thought: that this might be the last time he would ride with her. Women died sometimes.

Not Ellen, he thought after a moment, above the persistent whisper that ran on in his mind. Why not, that whisper said. Why couldn't she? She just couldn't, Calhoun thought. He wouldn't let her. But he knew he could do nothing and confused remembrances of the first time he'd ever seen her, the first time they'd gone out together, rose up in him with a chill of terror.

They'd always been happy, Calhoun thought. Then this — it went on for months but somehow as if it weren't happening to them, as if it concerned someone else. And now late one night — Calhoun swallowed. He thought they must have been crazy. Crazy! All the things in his mind, so ceaseless and so vivid there, seemed to push him with a kind of agony into the future, into a day to come, so that he wasn't really here in the cab holding her hand; he was there, next week, next month, and he was thinking that he'd known

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then, in the cab. It was the last time they'd ever —

At the hospital a dark little nurse took his name and had them sit down a moment while she saw about the room.

Calhoun put his hat on the floor and tried to be excessively cheerful.

"If it's a girl," he said, "we'll make a policewoman out of her. I'll bet you'd love that."

But that funny look was on Ellen's face again and she didn't answer him. Where was the nurse? It seemed ages before she returned.

"Maternity's on the sixth floor," she said, "and I think we'd better bring Mrs. Calhoun up right away. No, I'll take the bag; you'll have to stay here. There's a waiting-room down the hall."

Ellen kissed his cheek and he touched her shoulder, then stood watching as she followed the nurse to the elevator. Just as she stepped through he had a glimpse of her eyes and he wasn't sure whether she was crying or if it was only a reflection of light. Even if she felt bad she wouldn't let him see it. Ellen was like that. For a while he stood in the hall trying to think of something, of anything he could do to help her; finally he slapped his hat against his side and went into the waiting-room. But he couldn't sit still; he went back to the hall.

A small but very erect young man in an intern's suit was sitting on one corner of Miss Biddle's desk. Once or twice in the last few months Calhoun had met him — the last time in a dingy room where a young girl's body lay quietly on a bed. Young Dr. Minacorn — Windy Minnie to the hospital staff — had a sharp intellectual face and blond hair growing in a spike on his forehead. He greeted Calhoun with a smile.

"Well, well," he said, "a baby! And I didn't even know you were married."

"Cut the cracks," Calhoun said, looking at him levelly from under his brows. "It isn't anything to be wise about."

"Oh, don't take it that way," Dr. Minacorn said. "No offense."

Calhoun went back to the waiting-room without answering him. If only there were something he could do . . .

A fat man in the chair under the lamp was sleeping comfortably and he did not wake until a husky nurse in a white apron came to the door and called his name.

"Your wife's had a girl," she said, "and they're both fine. In half an hour you can go up to see them."

Yawning, the fat man sat up and thanked her. "But gosh," he told Calhoun conversationally after she'd gone, "I got to get some sleep. Time enough to see them tomorrow. After the first one there's not much difference anyway."

There was, Calhoun thought, no way to describe some guys. He cracked his knuckles and walked over to the window, then back to his chair, then over to the window again. He thought of Ellen again and wondered

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what was happening. Now, when he might lose her, he knew how much he loved her, he knew there was nobody else he could ever love. Three times in half an hour he went out to see Miss Biddle.

"I'm sorry," she always said, "but they haven't called down yet. They will, you know, when they take her to the delivery room. Until then there's nothing I can tell you."

"Okay," Calhoun said, rubbing a hand worriedly through his hair. "Maybe I'm a nuisance to you and I've laughed at stuff like this in the movies myself. Only it isn't so funny when it happens to you."

Dr. Minacorn, coming in from the yard after a cigarette, noticed him as he turned into the waiting-room. "How's our policeman holding out?" he asked Miss Biddle. "Any call for a sedative yet?"

"I wish you would give him something," Miss Biddle sighed. "Say a nice strong hypo to keep him quiet the rest of the night. He's out here every five minutes, asking."

"Quite understandable. Something like this," he went on, settling himself comfortably on the desk before her, "rather puzzles our friend. What can he do about it? To a man like Calhoun merely sitting about and waiting is an intolerable state of affairs."

Windy Minnie, Miss Biddle thought, was off again. She said only, "Uh huh," not to encourage him, and bent over her papers.

But Dr. Minacorn set his glasses more firmly on his nose and went on. Some day S. Kevin Minacorn, M.D., would be lecturing; meanwhile, practice was never out of place even with an audience of one.

"Calhoun, you see, is a man of action — not of thought. Keep his physical being occupied and he will not be overly concerned with the more sensitive side of things. Just now, of course, he is utterly at a loss. I daresay," Dr. Minacorn admitted thoughtfully, "he loves his wife. He appears to be extremely worried about her. But there's nothing at all he can do for her now and that preys on his mind. A man like Calhoun, particularly a policeman, is accustomed to action in its crudest manifestations. And if you think of it, the place of the policeman in the modern world is extremely interesting."

This time Miss Biddle made no remark. The hall was empty; there was no relief in sight. She wrote on.

"Extremely interesting," Dr. Minacorn continued, fascinated by his pursuit of an idea. "Take their social background alone and you are struck at the start by a somewhat startling fact — that our criminals and thugs and our — well, protectors, are all from the same social level. Your police today are actually legalized gangsters hired by society to protect it.

"Legalized gangsters," Dr. Minacorn repeated. "Why do you think Calhoun is a policeman? First, naturally, because he's unimaginative and a plodder; and second, because it's a remarkably easy living, with a little authority and no need for the un-

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pleasant job of thinking. Like the rest of his fellows he'll do as little of what he's supposed to do as he can get away with. The problems of society as a whole are meaningless to him."

Miss Biddle knew it was now or never, when he paused for breath. Once Windy Minnie got really started —

"Who," she asked, "are you going to take to the alumni dance?"

In the waiting-room Calhoun's mouth felt as dry and harsh as an oven. There wasn't a sound in the hospital nor in the streets. Calhoun thought vaguely of all the people in the world, of life and death and what they meant. He remembered how happy they had been and suddenly the recollection of that happiness frightened him, because things always struck at the happy ones. Perhaps if he didn't love her so much — and he didn't, really he didn't — nothing would happen to her. Nothing, God, Calhoun whispered. Because she was his wife and he loved her and if she died he'd be dead too. Panic struck at him again.

In the hall Miss Biddle muttered something when she saw him come out of the waiting-room and Dr. Minacorn, appearing from the emergency ward in overcoat and hat, stopped by her desk to wait for him.

"Here," he said, struck by a sudden inspiration — the man of action could be given something to do. "How about a ride with me, Calhoun? I've got a call to make."

Calhoun looked at him as if he weren't quite sure who he was, and then down at Miss Biddle.

"Don't be worrying about your wife," Dr. Minacorn said cheerfully. "She's all right but the first one's always long in coming. Any further word, Miss Biddle?"

Miss Biddle shook her head. "Nothing since the last."

"Then you've got all night," Dr. Minacorn said, gripping his arm. "And we won't be gone ten minutes. Come on, man. It will do you good."

Calhoun knew he couldn't go back to that room and just wait. He'd do something crazy if he had to sit there again. So after a moment he put on his hat dully and followed Minacorn out to the yard where an ambulance was waiting. "Okay," Dr. Minacorn said, getting in. "Let's roll, Eddie."

In the front seat of the car, crowded against Minacorn, it all began again in Calhoun's mind. Suppose now, this very moment, they sent word downstairs and he was not there. Suppose Ellen wanted to see him and they had to tell her that he'd gone, that — The four-block ride seemed endless; he was out first, anxious to be through quickly, as soon as Eddie pulled in to the pavement.

"Thirty-three," Minacorn said, looking up at the row of cheap tenements before them. "That's the one over there with the ashcans at the curb. They say what was wrong, Eddie?"

"Not that I heard," the driver said. "I just got the address."

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It was a somber street, fretful with shadows. Calhoun followed them around the ashcans, through a dirty hallway and up a flight of wooden stairs. At the first landing Dr. Minacorn peered about.

"Any apartment number, Eddie? These people never seem to —"

A boy leaned over the railing above them.

"It's up here," he said. "One more flight, Mister."

Minacorn bounced up that on his quick legs. "Now what's the matter?" he asked. "Who's sick?"

"Pietro," the boy said, staring at them with drawn dark eyes. "He boards with my mother. He's in there."

A gray-haired woman with a shawl around her shoulders spoke to him in rapid Italian. The boy looked up at them, again wetting his lips.

"She says she don't want him here no more. She's afraid. You'll have to take him away."

"First we'll have a look at him." Minacorn started for the door on the right of the landing. "In here, is he?"

"Watch out," the boy said. The woman spoke too in a flow of words that was shrilly urgent. Minacorn said sharply: "Keep quiet, please. We're not going to hurt him, you know," and opened the door.

Over his shoulder Calhoun saw a man facing them from the lighted kitchen — a thin tall man with wild black hair and glittering black eyes that had no sanity or balance in them. There was a rifle in his hands.

"What in hell —" Eddie breathed. He jumped aside and slammed the door just before the man fired. Dr. Minacorn had no chance to get out. He could only jump sideways away from the hole that the bullet had made in the glass upper-half of the door, not an inch from his head. Calhoun saw his shadow blur across the light an instant before it was extinguished.

Flattened out against the wall, Eddie stared wide-eyed at Calhoun, across the boy and his mother standing between them. The voice of the black-haired man screamed insanely at them from the darkened kitchen.

"He's crazy," the boy whispered. "He's been acting funny all week, showing me marks on the stoop where he said that the bullets people fired at him hit. Tonight when he took his gun out Mamma got scared. She made me call you."

Behind the door Dr. Minacorn said something but his voice was so low and shaky that Calhoun couldn't understand the words. Immediately the other man bore him down with harsh Italian.

"Now he says he's gonna kill him," the boy breathed holding Calhoun's hand. His young face was white as paper. Calhoun stared down at it for a moment and then looked at the driver. "Somebody's got to go in there," he said.

"Not me." Eddie went backward two steps down the stairs. "Not me. You got a riot squad to handle stuff like this. I saw his gun."

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Calhoun rubbed his mouth slowly and looked back along the hall. People were out on the stairs now from the other floors, huddling together in small groups. Inside the kitchen the madman still shouted.

"What's he saying now?" Calhoun asked.

The boy listened, shivering against his mother. "He says he knows who he is and he's going to kill him. He's telling him to get on his knees."

At the end of the hall there was another door. Calhoun saw it would lead into the parlor — there were two apartments on a floor, right and left of the landing, each running through from front to back — and he was moving back toward it before any plan of action cleared in his mind.

"Stay here," he told Eddie. "Make all the noise you can. I'll have to force this door."

Eddie nodded dumbly and, as Calhoun reached the front door, tramped up and down the stairs, shouted and then banged his body into the wall. In the middle of his yell Calhoun cracked his shoulder against the door in a lunge that burst the flimsy lock like the snapping of a rubber band.

He found himself in a small room with one window opening on the street and a lamp set on a table in the center of the floor, opposite a doorway just right of him that led back into the first bedroom. Calhoun saw that the lamp was going to be a danger — going back through the doorways from room to room he'd be silhouetted clearly against it. He could click it off, of course, but that was something this madman couldn't miss seeing, no matter how dimly it showed in the kitchen. Doing that, he might as well knock on the door and ask if he could come in. No, he couldn't touch it; he'd have to leave it on if he wanted to get out there before this crazy Pietro knew he was coming.

Bent low, he stepped through the doorway, across the line of light that for a prickly instant traced him clearly against itself. But there was no shot; the madman probably was facing Minacorn and the kitchen door. He wouldn't look back. Now, Calhoun thought, if he kept to the darkness left of the doorways, his only points of danger would be the openings themselves — the split seconds when he'd have to slip through them to reach each succeeding room. Even now he could make out nothing of the kitchen but a vague bluish shadow, thinned slightly where the light from the hall filtered through the glass upper-half of the door; there was no way of telling where the crazy man was standing. Just before he reached the second doorway he paused again to listen. Where was his voice coming from?

If you had asked Calhoun then why he was trying to reach that kitchen, the chances are that he wouldn't have been able to tell you. Someone, he might have said, had to get in there. And who was going to try if he didn't? That Eddie? Calhoun knew it was up to him, no one else. He was trying to get into that kitchen just as Dr. Minacorn might have grasped

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a patient's wrist to feel his pulse. Not entirely because he was a cop, not at all because it was Minacorn who was out there — Calhoun would have gone in if the man had been a stranger. The only thing worrying him now was whether or not this crazy Pietro was playing possum to get him closer. And the one way to answer that was to keep on going.

Calhoun kept on going.

He was in the second doorway now and he slipped through it safely. Across the one intervening room he began to distinguish objects in the kitchen: a chair, a table, someone that by the bag in one hand and the white trousers showing under the coat was obviously Dr. Minacorn. From the way his head was set Calhoun got a hint of where the madman was standing — somewhere left of the last doorway, probably against the far wall. There'd be six or seven feet to cover and not much time to get across it; still Calhoun thought he could do it. Even Minacorn hadn't noticed him yet; he was standing before the table as stiffly as if he'd been turned to stone.

"Now listen," he was saying in a voice he couldn't steady down. "I've come here to help you. I'm a doctor. Try to understand that, won't you? I'm not your enemy. I don't want to harm you. If you'll just try to see —"

Against those blazing eyes his words beat feebly, without effect. Dr. Minacorn saw that and he was badly frightened; in the shadow his pale cheeks seemed to gleam whiter than the speck of light reflected from his glasses. He had seen death many times before and it had never seemed important or particularly dreadful. If old men whose names he scarcely knew died now and again in a ward, Dr. Minacorn was sorry for them, of course. But what did it have to do with S. Kevin Minacorn, M.D., young and healthy Minacorn, immortal Minacorn? In some far-distant future, of course, he would come to it inevitably, even he. And so what, young Dr. Minacorn had thought, with that comfortable future before him, as solid as eternity. So what?

Just now, when the future was not so distant, it made a lot of difference. Across the dark kitchen he could see the face of the lunatic glaring at him — he could see the shape of it, long and pale, the eyes that glittered even in the blackness. But clearest of all, sharpest of all, he could see the gun.

And young Dr. Minacorn didn't want to die like this — foolishly, stupidly, without any sense to it; there were so many things he had to do first. Sometime, of course, it would have to come. But not now, not now! Trying to speak, thinking desperately that he must make his voice unalarmed, very soothing, he could not seem to hear his own words. But he was this man's friend; he wanted to help him. Now listen —

He dared not move, not even his arms; he knew if he did the madman would shoot him. In a few seconds now he might be dead. No one would help him — not Eddie, nor Calhoun,

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nor anyone. Why should they? If he were out there, he wouldn't come in. But damn them — oh, damn them, he thought illogically. He had been the fool; he had walked in first and been trapped, not listening to the boy —

From the last room Calhoun could see him standing there, moving his lips in a confused mumble. What was he trying to say? Calhoun couldn't make it out. Steadying himself for that last rush, Calhoun didn't think of this as something he was paid to do; he readied himself quite slowly and cautiously because of something in him that had been there before he was a cop, something that — it is possible — might have made him become a cop.

Yet something stopped him. It said: Why couldn't he stay here where he was until the riot squad came, or the cop on the beat, or someone to give him a hand? Why couldn't he let Minacorn take his chance? What business was it of his? He didn't even like the guy. But the thought never grew serious in his mind. Wasting time was stupid; he had to get back to the hospital. Maybe Ellen had had the kid now — his kid. That seemed odd. Calhoun couldn't understand it as he wet his lips and inched closer to the door. His kid!

Maybe that was the thing that stopped him, but only for a moment. All the time, really, he knew what he had to do. There was a crazy man in there who might kill another man. Calhoun had to stop him.

So he sprang through the doorway and hesitated there for the tiniest breath of time to locate this crazy Pietro exactly. Then Minacorn saw him, and Pietro too. The rifle swung around to Calhoun as he ran for it low, his arms outspread like a football player about to make a tackle. But the madman had to move the gun only slightly; he pressed the trigger twice as it swung across his belt.

Then Minacorn was on him, knocking him down with a wild swing of his bag, yanking the rifle from him and battering it against his head. "Eddie!" he yelled in a voice as shrill as a woman's, after the other man was still. "Eddie, Eddie!"

After a long while Eddie came through the kitchen door carefully. Dr. Minacorn was sitting in a chair, the muscles in his legs jumping and quivering as if they were alive — as if they would never be steady enough to hold him up.

Calhoun lay on the floor, his fine big body still, touched by a last quiet magic that showed no mark in his face, yet that somehow, very deftly, had taken from him reason and emotion, all curiosity.

"Is he —" Eddie asked huskily.

"Gone," Dr. Minacorn said. His voice came out strong now and he knew he'd be all right in a minute. Because it wasn't now, but sometime in the far-distant future, sometime so remote that it would be another Minacorn who would meet it — an old Minacorn, philosophical and tired.

He sat in his chair and stared at Calhoun. Minacorn was so glad to be

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alive that he couldn't move. Death was remote again, impersonal. Tomorrow he would never have been afraid. Even now he was thinking that this way wasn't so bad. Calhoun could never have felt a thing. Just —

After the husky nurse saw that the waiting-room was deserted she continued down the hall to Miss Biddle's desk.

"Where's the big fellow?" she asked. "Calhoun?"

Miss Biddle stood up and stretched. It was proving a long night.

"You mean the cop — the legalized gangster? He went out with Windy Minnie."

"So he is a cop," the husky nurse said. "You know he really looks like one."

"Big and dumb," Miss Biddle yawned, "but kind of nice though. You should have heard the lecture Minnie gave me about them. I can't remember half of it."

"Who ever could?" the husky nurse said. "Any time after three you can send this Calhoun up. His wife's had a boy. I guess he'll want to see it."

"I guess he will," Miss Biddle said.

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AN EQMM "SPECIAL"

THE BOOKHAWKER

by LANCE SIEVEKING

JOSEPH MARTIN LOOKED HOPEFULLY up at the great stone building and walked briskly in at the main door. He read the names on the board in the lobby. Diligently he read them, as though for inspiration.

He was an unimposing figure of a man, narrow-chested and shiny of coat. He had about his young yet heavily lined face an air which combined the confident with the furtive. In his left hand he carried a sort of suitcase, made of imitation leather, which had long since grown too tired to keep up the illusion. His hat was shapeless, his boots indiscreet.

"Well, here goes," he murmured aloud, and strolled toward the stairs.

A dim man put his head out of a little glass box and stared at him.

"What d'you want?"

"Business with Messrs. Acton & Hammond," answered Joseph Martin promptly, quoting the first name on the board.

"Ah," said the dim man and withdrew into the box apparently satisfied.

The stairs wound stonily upward and the man with the suitcase found himself at length in a long bare passage lined with doors, the upper panels of which were of frosted glass and had names printed on them in black letters. All of them were labeled *Private*, but to Joseph Martin other people's privacy was his publicity. He was a bookhawker. He touted. His suitcase was filled with cheap reprints of an out-of-date, incomplete, and grandly inaccurate encyclopedia.

He paused before a door on which was written:

MARK KAFFIN
Stockbroker
Private

and grasping the handle firmly, he stepped inside.

An old man looked vaguely up at the sound, and with a wandering gesture of the hand, drew some spectacles down from his forehead to his eyes.

"Eh? Eh? What do you want?" he quavered.

Joseph Martin closed the door.

"I want to see Mr. Kaffin."

"I doubt if that is possible," mumbled the other. "But I'll see."

His slippered feet shuffled to a door on which he knocked. As it opened, a sound of voices came to Joseph's ears — old, old voices, cracked and uncertain.

In a while the aged clerk returned.

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"Mr. Kaffin is busy," he remarked.

Joseph braced himself and put a bold face on the matter. This old fellow was far too feeble to throw him downstairs, in any event!

"Martin is my name. I have here . . ."

He paused for the look of disgust which usually followed these words, but the old man's eyes only rested mildly on his, awaiting further information.

"I have here, in this bag, an encyclopedia."

The aged clerk nodded sympathetically.

"*Eh?*" exclaimed Joseph incredulously.

"Interested like," murmured the other.

"Well, it's a good one. You can't afford to be without a first-class encyclopedia these days."

"Dear me, no!" agreed the old man.

Joseph passed his hand across his forehead and dropped onto a chair. Either the old man was mad, or he had walked into some kind of a trap. Perhaps this was the office of a man who had suffered some terrible invasion of book-touts in the past, and had sworn to do dreadful things to all who came bothering him in the future. Perhaps at this very moment, beyond that glass door, the unknown Mr. Kaffin was sharpening a long curved knife, or greasing the wheels of some highly scientific instrument of torture.

So far did Joseph's imagination run loose that if the door in question had not at that moment opened, he would have taken a hasty and unobtrusive leave.

Two old men came into the room, talking together earnestly. They were, as far as Joseph could judge, much older than the clerk. Neither of them, he decided, could be less than 75. They stood grasping each other's hands and nodding. Joseph caught the words:

"Seventy thousand Kolobars at par, I think you said, Mr. Parker?"

"Yes, yes," answered the squeaky voice of the other old man. "And as for my holdings in Chung Wu Fong rails, sell 'em all. Sell 'em for what they fetch, Mr. Kaffin. And good day to ye!"

"Good day to *you*, Mr. Parker!"

After a prolonged handshaking, the door at last closed on Mr. Parker's snowy head and long frockcoat, and Mr. Kaffin's dim eyes focused themselves on the young stranger.

"And this is Mr. . . . Mr. . . .?"

"Martin, sir. I have here . . ."

"Quite so," said the aged Mr. Kaffin in a puzzled sort of way. "But you are strangely young, sir. Strangely young!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"No need. No need. Come into my office."

As he followed Mr. Kaffin past the clerk's table, Joseph noticed that that worthy man was engaged in sticking stamps onto a huge pile of envelopes. But the stamps he was sticking were like no stamps Joseph had ever seen before. They were bright crimson in

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color and had a full-face portrait of an unfamiliar head on them.

"Well, Mr. Martin," said the quavery old voice. "And to what am I indebted . . .?"

Joseph grasped the handle of his bag firmly and pulled open the lid.

"I have here an encyclopedia which I may confidently say is absolutely indispensable in any office."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Mr. Kaffin, lowering himself into his chair and taking a pinch of snuff. "How very interesting. Pray tell me all about it."

The young man gazed wildly at him for an instant, bit his lip, and plunged.

"I am glad, Mr. Kaffin, to have caught you at a time when you are free for a moment. This encyclopedia, you will find, will never let you down. It has been compiled by the most learned professors of our great universities at fabulous expense, and copies of it have been sold to hundreds of businessmen in London."

"How splendid!" wheezed the other, pressing his fingertips together ecstatically.

"We have thousands of completely unsolicited testimonials, all of them confirming my assertions in regard to this work. If I could prevail on you to . . ."

"Come, come, *come!*" said old Mr. Kaffin reprovingly. "Surely that is not all? Have you not forgotten something?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Surely it is not customary to get to the point so quickly as that? Why, you haven't been speaking for more than a minute and a half!"

"But . . ."

"Ah, well. I thought you were strangely young. Let me have a look at the book, then."

In a sort of daze Joseph handed the old man a copy of the encyclopedia. He turned it over and over between his long bony fingers, murmuring indistinctly to himself. There was a tap on the door.

"Yes?" The aged clerk appeared.

"Mr. Jarvis Grant and Sir George to see you, sir."

Old Mr. Kaffin's face was wreathed in smiles.

"What! Mr. Jarvis Grant *and* Sir George?" he cried delightedly. "Both in one morning. Tell them to wait, Richards. Tell 'em I can't see them for at least five minutes. Give them cigars."

He turned back to Joseph and beamed jovially.

"Wonderful thing, stockbrokering!" he said, sucking his teeth appreciatively. "Now let's hear more about this encyclopedia of yours, Mr. Martin. It's delightful . . . er . . . delightful!"

Joseph uncrossed his legs and looked at the ceiling. Either the men in this office were mad or he was. However, if he could unload an encyclopedia on them, madness could wait. He cudgeled his brain for phrases, and embarked on a prolonged and highly colored panegyric on books of reference in general and this one in particular. All the while Mr. Kaffin interjected little

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grunts of satisfaction, and nodded vigorously when Joseph made a special point.

At last the young man came to the end of his invention, and, pausing, looked inquiringly at the old man at the desk.

"I suppose you want me to buy a copy, eh?"

"You would be doing yourself a great service, Mr. Kaffin," was the impressive answer.

"I will take three copies!"

Almost unable to believe his ears, Joseph carried the other two books over to him.

"And the price?"

"Twenty-one shillings and sixpence each."

The old man swiveled round in his chair.

"I won't pay a penny more than a pound, sir, and that's flat!"

"Come, come, Mr. Kaffin, sir. Make it twenty shillings and sixpence. That's not unreasonable. I can tell you that I don't get much commission out of it myself."

The other appeared to reflect deeply. Then he picked up a fresh pair of spectacles and put them on his nose below the pair which was already there.

"I consent," he said. "Twenty shillings and sixpence let it be."

He produced an immense check book out of a drawer and proceeded to write a check.

"Pay Joseph Martin the sum of . . . of . . . three pounds, one shilling and sixpence. There you are!" he concluded, tearing it off and thrusting it into the other's hand.

Joseph glanced at the check and put it into his waistcoat pocket. Then without more ado he picked up his bag and took his leave.

On his way through the outer office he came on two feeble old men smoking cigars. They looked at him with interest, and the taller of the two remarked:

"Are you coming to see me this morning, sir?"

"Of course I am," said Joseph Martin promptly.

"On the fourth floor. Sir George Gramping. You can't miss it."

"I am on the first floor at the end of the passage," interrupted the second old man.

Joseph smiled cheerfully.

"I'll look in in half an hour, Mr. Grant."

"*Jarvis* Grant, sir. *Jarvis* Grant!"

"Certainly, Mr. Jarvis Grant," replied the young man suavely and bowed himself out.

Once more into the passage, he produced a handkerchief and passed it several times across his forehead.

"This is my lucky day, dear mother!" he muttered under his breath.

Similar experiences awaited him in the next two offices he visited. A tea importer and a firm of timber merchants bought an encyclopedia apiece and wrote checks. Each one of these men commented on his youth as though it were a peculiar and remarkable thing.

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At length he found himself at the door of Sir George Gramping, Contractor to His Majesty's Government. He walked in boldly. The old gentleman greeted him with a warm handshake and gave him a glass of sherry.

Settling himself comfortably in a deep armchair, Sir George prepared himself to listen to his visitor's remarks. Halfway through the first preamble a bell rang and Sir George unhooked a quaint old-fashioned telephone.

"Who's there? Robertson, eh? Speaking for Messrs. Carberry, Banks & Sandeman. Quite so. A hundred tons, I think we agreed. One moment."

He broke off and looked up.

"Pray excuse me, Mr. Martin."

"Oh, *please!*" replied the young man warmly.

In reply to a hand-bell a bald man of about 60 appeared.

"Rogers, please look up our letter of the fourteenth to Messrs. Carberry, Banks & Sandeman."

By and by the bald-headed man returned with a sheet of paper. Sir George turned to the telephone.

"A hundred and *ten* tons it was, Mr. Robertson, and we take delivery at the quay. Goodbye."

He turned to Joseph with a happy smile.

"Cement, that. I always buy cement in little lots like that. It makes it so much more interesting. Tomorrow it'll be bricks. Ten thousand red bricks and 20,000 yellow ones. I always contract for bricks on Wednesdays. Routine! Regularity! That is the secret of success, you know. Bricks on Wednesday, iron on Thursday, interview architects on Friday, and so on. Routine! And now, Mr. Martin, pray continue about your encyclopedia."

When at length Joseph left Sir George's office he was quite worn out. No amount of work in the ordinary way ever had the slightest effect upon him. But the weird way in which he succeeded in selling his wares to everyone whom he tried was beginning to tell on his nerves. It wasn't natural. If they had been rude, cut him short, shown him the door, or even kicked him through it, he would have understood it. But *this* . . . this was too much.

He walked down to the ground floor, deciding as he went that Mr. Jarvis Grant should be the last. Indeed, he had sold all but two of his books and his bag was light in a way he had never before known.

Mr. Jarvis Grant's door bore the words, *Chartered Accountant*, and underneath *Inquiries Within*. Joseph opened the door and found himself standing at a counter.

"Fill in that form, will you?" said a thin, faint voice.

"Oh, see here!" answered the visitor loudly. "I am Mr. Martin. Mr. Grant is expecting me."

"To be sure," said the other, lifting a flap in the counter.

The young man strode in and, crossing the room, knocked at a glass pane marked *Private*.

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"Come in!"

Mr. Jarvis Grant looked him up and down.

"What is it, eh?"

There was a queer mixture in his voice and expression. He seemed to be both delighted and angry at the same time.

"I have here . . ." began Joseph.

"I know what you are!" interrupted the old man roughly. "And I can't be bothered. Get out!"

"But you asked me to come," protested Joseph.

"Of course I did. Splendid idea of Murray's, splendid. Book-tout indeed! Get out, I say. My time is money, sir! Get out before I throw you out!"

Joseph, now convinced that he was in the company of a lunatic, moved hastily toward the door, but was not quick enough to avoid the kick which old Mr. Grant planted nimbly on his retreating form. The door banged to, and Mr. Grant's voice was heard to remark triumphantly:

"Mag-nificent! I haven't kicked a book-tout for fifteen years. Grand idea of Murray's! Oh, my gouty foot! Damme! I forgot my gouty foot!"

Joseph stumbled blindly into the passage, and pulling himself together, made for the main entrance.

The sun was shining in the street, and there was a genial warmth and the noise of traffic. He whistled as he went. His last reception had cleared his head. He realized that Mr. Jarvis Grant had done him a service. He was used to being kicked out of offices and expected it.

He turned in at a public house and leaning wearily against the counter, demanded a whiskey and soda. As he sipped he drew from his pocket a bundle of checks. One by one he spread them out and contemplated them. It was the best morning's work he had ever done. All at once he blinked violently and peered closer at one of the checks:

Murray's Counter Bank, Limited
City Branch

He clapped his hand to his forehead.

"What in the world!"

He quickly scanned the other checks. They were all the same. Then he examined the stamp. It was the usual oval with white lettering in the center, only there was no crown. The word NOTHING was printed in thin capitals and surrounded by a garland of conventional flowers.

"My God!" cried the young man. "Duds! Every one of them!"

Gulping down his whiskey, he fled up the street to the large block of offices he had quitted only ten minutes before. He rushed in and attempted to brush past a group of men who were talking in the hall, but a hand grasped his arm firmly and brought him to a standstill.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, my friend?" demanded a powerful-looking man of about 40.

"You mind your own business!"

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"As it happens, this *is* my business. This is a private building."

"That may be, but I've been swindled by a gang of crooks!"

"Easy now!" chimed in another voice. "Mind what you're saying. Why can't you tell Mr. Murray what's the matter?"

Joseph dropped his bag.

"So you're Murray, are you?"

"That's my name."

"Then perhaps you'll kindly explain what all those old guys in these offices meant when they said, 'It's a splendid idea of Murray's'?"

"By all means," replied the other, loosening his hold. "It was because they thought I had invented you."

"*Invented* me?"

Mr. Murray nodded.

"Come here," he said, and led Joseph up to the large board by the door. Beneath the list of names a small notice said *Counter Club, Ltd.*

"See that? Well, allow me to tell you that if you've been in here already, you have been trespassing on private property. This is a club."

Slowly Joseph produced a bundle of checks which he passed to the other man, who burst out laughing.

"You're an unfortunate man, Mr. Joseph Martin! It was your own bluff that brought you to grief. My porter tells me you said you had business with Messrs. Acton & Hammond. That's why he let you pass. 'Business' is the password here.

"You see," began Mr. Murray, "when a man has been going to an office regularly for the best part of his life, the thing becomes a habit not easily broken. Retirement is always a terrible wrench. Some men, when they retire from business, find themselves utterly at a loss, and continually long to be back in the thick of it. There are two obstacles. First, one has to make room for the younger men, and second *real* business is too exacting for a man on the wrong side of 65. They make fatal errors through failing judgment, the hours are too long, and the strain too great.

"So I step in and provide them with a place where they may continue to do business for the rest of their lives, just as they always did. With this one difference, that here they do business with counters, not with money. Stocks and shares are bought and sold on our Exchange; bonds and share certificates here are worth nothing more than their face values.

"This morning an immensely wealthy wholesale wool merchant was ruined. He went into immediate bankruptcy. He was delighted! He says that the sensation of being ruined is a thing he wouldn't have missed for worlds!

"I regret to tell you that all these checks are, of course, worthless. But the members are so grateful to you for bringing back into their lives the element of actual business that they have expressed their intention of giving you real checks in place of these you have, and they hope you will consent to be present at a dinner to be given tonight in your honor."

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ANECDOTAGE

One Sunday evening in the autumn of 1930, Arthur Rogers, the well-known rare-book dealer of Newcastle-on-Tyne, was visiting a bookseller friend, Leslie Chaundy, in the latter's flat near Oxford Circus, London. They were sitting and talking in the dusk, just after tea, when Mrs. Chaundy came in and told them that the lights in the flat had blown out, owing to a fused wire; they would have to light the candles because it would be impossible to find an electrician on a Sunday evening.

Mr. Rogers protested that it was quite a simple matter to repair the damaged wire. He could do it in a few seconds if the Chaundys would merely supply him with a piece of wire and a pair of pliers. Well, the Chaundy household boasted pliers, but no replacement wire.

Mr. Rogers, not to be daunted, went to the flat downstairs and knocked on the door. After a few moments the door was opened by a white-haired old gentleman. Mr. Rogers apologized for his intrusion and asked to borrow a short length of wire. The venerable gentleman seemed surprised — no, actually shocked — by Mr. Rogers's request. He murmured something about his wife and left Mr. Rogers standing at the door, gazing at the hallway leading into the flat. On the wall of the hallway Mr. Rogers noticed a beautiful painting which he recognized as the work of David Cox. As a person with some expert knowledge of early English water colors, Mr. Rogers could not help marveling that anyone owning such a fine and valuable picture should hang it in the outer hall of a London flat.

Presently a lady appeared. She was also white-haired, and she had the same gentle charm and the same distinction of manner that Mr. Rogers had felt in the company of the old gentleman. The old lady handed Mr. Rogers a coil of wire, and after appropriate thanks, Mr. Rogers went back upstairs. He had the distinct feeling on departure that both the old man and the old lady were sorry to see him go away.

After repairing the burnt-out wire, Mr. Rogers was met with an incredulous question from his host and hostess: Where on earth did he get the new wire? Mr. Rogers explained, only to see horror, dismay, and consternation on the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Chaundy. "But we don't know the people downstairs — we have never once spoken to them," they gasped. Only then did Mr. Rogers remember that in a metropolis like London (or New York), unlike the more friendly Northern region in

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which he lived, it was possible — indeed, probable! — that one could live for years in the same flat or apartment and not even know one's next-door neighbor!

After Mr. Rogers left for home, Mr. Chaundy found an opportunity to apologize to his neighbor for Mr. Rogers's intrusion. To Mr. Chaundy's surprise, the old gentleman seemed not at all disposed to resent Mr. Rogers's unexpected visit — in fact, he appeared to be glad that an outsider had knocked on his door. Later, Mr. Chaundy learned the reason.

The old man and his wife had been living in complete seclusion, hidden away in a London flat. Their happiness had been shattered when their only son had become mortally wounded in World War I. To be near the boy, who was in a London hospital, the parents had sold their large country house and rented the flat. When the son died, the two broken old souls cut themselves off from the outside world, to the extent of even having their telephone removed. Mr. Rogers's knock on the door of their flat was the first contact, other than the buying of food, that the two old people had had with the outer world in more than ten whole years!

Eventually, the old gentleman learned of Mr. Rogers's interest in the water color by David Cox, and when Mr. Rogers paid another visit to the Chaundys, the old man invited Mr. Rogers to view his collection of paintings. No wonder the David Cox had been hung in the hallway! In the five rooms of the old gentleman's flat Mr. Rogers saw paintings by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Zoffany, Hogarth, Cotman, Crome, Peter de Wint, Whistler, and many other famous artists. It was sheer delight to hear the old man talk about his collection and reminisce about the past — altogether a memorable evening in the life of Mr. Rogers.

When in the early 1930s Mr. Rogers and his friend Chaundy told their acquaintances about the old gentleman, they were consistently greeted with skepticism. "What? — the famous author of TALES OF MEAN STREETS *— the oldtime detective-story writer — the contemporary of Conan Doyle! Why, their two detectives were appearing at the same time! No, it's impossible — it couldn't have been Arthur Morrison!"*

But it was. The creator of Martin Hewitt, the old master who had been thought dead for years, was the white-haired gentleman who had answered Mr. Rogers's knock on that Sunday evening in the autumn of 1930 — long, long after his detective character, now linked chronologically with Sherlock Holmes, made his debut in print . . .

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THE FLITTERBAT LANCERS

by ARTHUR MORRISON

IT WAS LATE ON A SUMMER EVENING, two or three years back, that I drowsed in my armchair over a particularly solid and ponderous volume of essays on social economy. I was doing a good deal of reviewing at the time, and I remember well that this particular volume had a property of such exceeding toughness that I had already made three successive attacks on it, on as many successive evenings, each attack having been defeated in the end by sleep. The weather was hot, my chair was very comfortable, and the book had somewhere about its strings of polysyllables an essence as of laudanum. Still something had been done on each evening, and now on the fourth I strenuously endeavored to finish the book. I was just beginning to feel that the words before me were sliding about and losing their meanings, when a sudden crash and a jingle of broken glass behind me woke me with a start, and I threw the book down. A pane of glass in my window was smashed, and I hurried across and threw up the sash to see, if I could, whence the damage had come.

The building in which my chambers (and Martin Hewitt's office) were situated was accessible — or rather visible, for there was no entrance — from the rear. There was, in fact, a small courtyard, reached by a passage from the street behind, and into this courtyard my sitting-room window looked.

"Hullo there!" I shouted. But there came no reply. Nor could I distinguish anybody in the courtyard. Some men had been at work during the day on a drain-pipe, and I reflected that probably their litter had provided the stone with which my window had been smashed. As I looked, however, two men came hurrying from the passage into the court, and going straight into the deep shadow of one corner, presently appeared again in a less obscure part, hauling forth a third man, who must have already been there in hiding. The third man struggled fiercely, but without avail, and was dragged across toward the passage leading to the street beyond. But the most remarkable feature of the whole thing was the silence of all three men. No cry, no exclamation, escaped any of them. In perfect silence the two hauled the third across the courtyard, and in perfect silence he swung and struggled to resist and escape. The matter astonished me not a little, and the men were entering the passage before I found voice to shout at them. But they took no notice, and disappeared. Soon after I heard cab wheels in the street beyond, and had no doubt that the two men had carried off their prisoner.

I turned back into my room a

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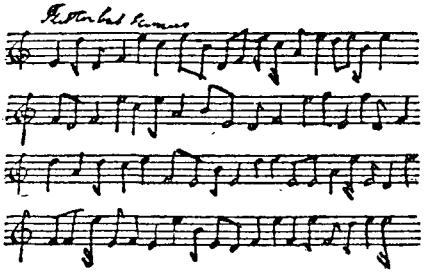
little perplexed. It seemed probable that the man who had been borne off had broken my window. But why? I looked about on the floor, and presently found the missile. It was, as I had expected, a piece of broken concrete, but it was wrapped up in a worn piece of paper, which had partly opened out as it lay on my carpet, thus indicating that it had just been crumpled round the stone.

I disengaged the paper and spread it out. Then I saw it to be a rather hastily written piece of manuscript music, whereof I append a reduced facsimile:

This gave me no help. I turned the paper this way and that, but could make nothing of it. There was not a mark on it that I could discover, except the music and the scrawled title, *Flitterbat Lancers*, at the top. The paper was old, dirty, and cracked. What did it all mean? One might conceive of a person in certain circumstances sending a message — possibly an appeal for help — through a friend's window, wrapped round a stone, but this seemed to be nothing of that sort.

Once more I picked up the paper, and with an idea to hear what the *Flitterbat Lancers* sounded like, I turned to my little pianette and strummed over the notes, making my own time and changing it as seemed likely. But I could by no means extract from the notes anything resembling an air. I half thought of trying Martin Hewitt's office door, in case he might still be there and could offer a guess at the meaning of my smashed window and the scrap of paper, when Hewitt himself came in. He had stayed late to examine a bundle of papers in connection with a case just placed in his hands, and now, having finished, came to find if I were disposed for an evening stroll before turning in. I handed him the paper and the piece of concrete, observing, "There's a little job for you, Hewitt, instead of the stroll." And I told him the complete history of my smashed window.

Hewitt listened attentively, and examined both the paper and the fragment of paving. "You say these people made absolutely no sound whatever?" he asked.

"None but that of scuffling, and even that they seemed to do quietly."

"Could you see whether or not the two men gagged the other, or placed their hands over his mouth?"

"No, they certainly didn't do that. It was dark, of course, but not so dark as to prevent my seeing generally what they were doing."

Hewitt stood for half a minute in thought, and then said, "There's

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something in this, Brett — what, I can't guess at the moment, but something deep, I fancy. Are you sure you won't come out now?"

I told Hewitt that I was sure, and that I should stick to my work.

"Very well," he said; "then perhaps you will lend me these articles?" holding up the paper and the stone.

"Delighted," I said. "If you get no more melody out of the clinker than I did out of the paper, you won't have a musical evening. Goodnight!"

Hewitt went away with the puzzle in his hand, and I turned once more to my social economy, and, thanks to the gentleman who smashed my window, conquered.

At this time my only regular daily work was on an evening paper, so that I left home at a quarter to 8 on the morning following the adventure of my broken window, in order, as usual, to be at the office at 8; consequently it was not until lunch-time that I had an opportunity of seeing Hewitt. I went to my own rooms first, however, and on the landing by my door I found the housekeeper in conversation with a shortish, sun-browned man, whose accent at once convinced me that he hailed from across the Atlantic. He had called, it appeared, three or four times during the morning to see me, getting more impatient each time. As he did not seem even to know my name, the housekeeper had not considered it expedient to give him any information about me, and he was growing irascible under the treatment. When I at last appeared, however, he left her and approached me eagerly.

"See here, sir," he said, "I've been stumpin' these here durn stairs o' yours half through the mornin'. I'm anxious to apologize, and fix up some damage."

He had followed me into my sitting-room, and was now standing with his back to the fireplace, a dripping umbrella in one hand, and the forefinger of the other held up shoulder-high and pointing, in the manner of a pistol, to my window, which, by the way, had been mended during the morning, in accordance with my instructions to the housekeeper.

"Sir," he continued, "last night I took the extreme liberty of smashin' your winder."

"Oh," I said, "that was you, was it?"

"It was, sir — me. For that I hev come humbly to apologize. I trust the draft has not discommoded you, sir. I regret the accident, and I wish to pay for the fixin' up and the general inconvenience." He placed a sovereign on the table. "I 'low you'll call that square now, sir, and fix things friendly and comfortable as between gentlemen, an' no ill will. Shake."

And he formally extended his hand.

I took it at once. "Certainly," I said. "As a matter of fact, you haven't inconvenienced me at all; indeed, there were some circumstances about

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the affair that rather interested me." And I pushed the sovereign toward him.

"Say now," he said, looking a trifle disappointed at my unwillingness to accept his money, "didn't I startle your nerves?"

"Not a bit," I answered, laughing. "In fact, you did me a service by preventing me going to sleep just when I shouldn't; so we'll say no more of that."

"Well — there was one other little thing," he pursued, looking at me rather sharply as he pocketed the sovereign. "There was a bit o' paper round that pebble that came in here. Didn't happen to notice that, did you?"

"Yes, I did. It was an old piece of manuscript music."

"That was it — exactly. Might you happen to have it handy now?"

"Well," I said, "as a matter of fact a friend of mine has it now. I tried playing it over once or twice, as a matter of curiosity, but I couldn't make anything of it, and so I handed it to him."

"Ah!" said my visitor, watching me narrowly, "that's a puzzler, that *Flitterbat Lancers* — a real puzzler. It whips 'em all. Ha, ha!" He laughed suddenly — a laugh that seemed a little artificial. "There's music fellers as 'lows to set right down and play off anything right away that can't make anything of the *Flitterbat Lancers*. That was two of 'em that was monkeyin' with me last night. They never could make anythin' of it at all, and I was tantalizing them with it all along till they got real mad, and reckoned to get it out o' my pocket and learn it at home. Ha, ha! So I got away for a bit, and just rolled it round a stone and heaved it through your winder before they could come up, your winder bein' the nearest one with a light in it. Ha, ha! I'll be considerable obliged if you'll get it from your friend right now. Is he stayin' hereabout?"

The story was so ridiculously lame that I determined to confront my visitor with Hewitt, and observe the result. If he had succeeded in making any sense of the *Flitterbat Lancers*, the scene might be amusing. So I answered at once, "Yes; his office is on the floor below; he will probably be in at about this time. Come down with me."

We went down, and found Hewitt in his outer office. "This gentleman," I told him with a solemn intonation, "has come to ask for his piece of manuscript music, the *Flitterbat Lancers*. He is particularly proud of it, because nobody who tries to play it can make any sort of tune out of it, and it was entirely because two dear friends of his were anxious to drag it out of his pocket and practice it over on the quiet that he flung it through my window-pane last night, wrapped round a piece of concrete."

The stranger glanced sharply at me, and I could see that my manner and tone rather disconcerted him. But Hewitt came forward at once. "Oh, yes," he said. "Just so — quite a

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natural sort of thing. As a matter of fact, I quite expected you. Your umbrella's wet — do you mind putting it in the stand? Thank you. Come into my private office."

We entered the inner room, and Hewitt, turning to the stranger, went on: "Yes, that is a very extraordinary piece of music, that *Flitterbat Lancers*. I have been having a little practice with it myself, though I'm really nothing of a musician. I don't wonder you are anxious to keep it to yourself. Sit down."

The stranger, with a distrustful look at Hewitt, complied. At this moment Hewitt's clerk, Kerrett, entered from the outer office with a slip of paper. Hewitt glanced at it, and crumpled it in his hand. "I am engaged just now," was his remark, and Kerrett vanished.

"And now," Hewitt said, as he sat down and suddenly turned to the stranger with an intent gaze, "and now, Mr. Hooker, we'll talk of this music."

The stranger started and frowned. "You've the advantage of me, sir," he said; "you seem to know my name, but I don't know yours."

Hewitt smiled pleasantly. "My name," he said, "is Hewitt — Martin Hewitt, and it is my business to know a great many things. For instance, I know that you are Mr. Reuben B. Hooker, of Robertsville, Ohio."

The visitor pushed his chair back, and stared. "Well — that gits me," he said. "You're a pretty smart chap, Mr. Hewitt. I've heard your name before, of course. And — and so you've been a-studyin' the *Flitterbat Lancers*, have you?" This with a keen glance at Hewitt's face. "Well, s'pose you have. What's your idea?"

"Why," answered Hewitt, still keeping his steadfast gaze on Hooker's eyes, "I think it's pretty late in the century to be fishing about for the Wedlake jewels."

These words astonished me almost as much as they did Mr. Hooker. The great Wedlake jewel robbery is, as many will remember, a traditional story of the 'sixties. I remembered no more of it at the time than probably most men do who have at some time or another read the *causes célèbres* of the century. Sir Francis Wedlake's country house had been robbed, and the whole of Lady Wedlake's magnificent collection of jewels stolen. A man named Shiels, a strolling musician, had been arrested and had been sentenced to a long term of penal servitude. Another man named Legg — one of the comparatively wealthy scoundrels who finance promising thefts or swindles and pocket the greater part of the proceeds — had also been punished, but only a very few of the trinkets, and those quite unimportant items, had been recovered. The great bulk of the booty was never brought to light. So much I remembered, and Hewitt's sudden mention of the Wedlake jewels in connection with my broken window, Mr. Reuben B. Hooker, and the *Flitterbat Lancers*, astonished me not a little.

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As for Hooker, he did his best to hide his perturbation, but with little success. "Wedlake jewels, eh?" he said; "and — and what's that to do with it, anyway?"

"To do with it?" responded Hewitt, with an air of carelessness. "Well, well, I had my idea, nothing more. If the Wedlake jewels have nothing to do with it, we'll say no more about it, that's all. Here's your paper, Mr. Hooker — only a little crumpled." He rose and placed the article in Mr. Hooker's hand, with the manner of terminating the interview.

Hooker rose, with a bewildered look on his face, and turned toward the door. Then he stopped, looked at the floor, scratched his cheek, and finally sat down again and put his hat on the ground. "Come," he said, "we'll play a square game. That paper *has* something to do with the Wedlake jewels, and, win or lose, I'll tell you all I know about it. You're a smart man and whatever I tell you, I guess it won't do me no harm; it ain't done me no good yet, anyway."

"Say what you please, of course," Hewitt answered, "but think first. You might tell me something you'd be sorry for afterward."

"Say, will you just listen to what I say, and tell me if you think I've been swindled or not? My $250 is gone now, and I guess I won't go skirmishing after it any more if you think it's no good. Will you do that much?"

"As I said before," Hewitt replied, "tell me what you please, and if I can help you I will. But remember, I don't ask for your secrets."

"That's all right, I guess, Mr. Hewitt. Well, now, it was all like this." And Mr. Reuben B. Hooker plunged into a detailed account of his adventures since his arrival in London.

Relieved of repetitions, and put as directly as possible, it was as follows: Mr. Hooker was a wagon-builder, had made a good business from very humble beginnings, and intended to go on and make it still a better. Meantime, he had come over to Europe for a short holiday — a thing he had promised himself for years. He was wandering about the London streets on the second night after his arrival in the city, when he managed to get into conversation with two men at a bar. They were not very prepossessing men, though flashily dressed. Very soon they suggested a game of cards. But Reuben B. Hooker was not to be had in that way, and after a while they parted. The two were amusing enough fellows in their way, and when Hooker saw them again the next night in the same bar, he made no difficulty in talking with them freely. After a succession of drinks, they told him that they had a speculation on hand — a speculation that meant thousands if it succeeded — and to carry out which they were only waiting for a paltry sum of £50. There was a house, they said, in which was hidden a great number of jewels of immense value, which had been deposited there by a man who was now dead. Exactly in what part of the

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house the jewels were to be found they did not know. There was a paper, they said, which was supposed to contain some information, but as yet they hadn't quite been able to make it out. But that would really matter very little if once they could get possession of the house. Then they would simply set to work and search from the topmost chimney to the lowermost brick, if necessary. The only present difficulty was that the house was occupied, and that the landlord wanted a large deposit of rent down before he would consent to turn out his present tenants and give them possession at a higher rental. This deposit would come to £50, and they hadn't the money. However, if any friend of theirs who meant business would put the necessary sum at their disposal, and keep his mouth shut, they would make him an equal partner in the proceeds with themselves; and as the value of the whole haul would probably be something not very far off £20,000, the speculation would bring a tremendous return to the man who was smart enough to put down his £50.

Hooker, very distrustful, skeptically demanded more detailed particulars of the scheme. But these the men (Luker and Birks were their names, he found, in course of talking) inflexibly refused to communicate.

"Is it likely," said Luker, "that we should give the 'ole thing away to anybody who might easily go with his £50 and clear out the bloomin' show? Not much. We've told you what the game is, and if you'd like to take a flutter with your £50, all right; you'll do as well as anybody, and we'll treat you square. If you don't — well, don't, that's all. We'll get the oof from somewhere — there's blokes as 'ud jump at the chance. Anyway, we ain't going to give the show away before you've done somethin' to prove you're on the job, straight. Put your money in, and you shall know as much as we do."

Then there were more drinks, and more discussion. Hooker was still reluctant, though tempted by the prospect, and growing more venturesome with each drink.

"Don't you see," said Birks, "that if we was a-tryin' to 'ave you we should out with a tale as long as yer arm, all complete, with the address of the 'ouse and all. Then I s'pose you'd lug out the pieces on the nail, without askin' a bloomin' question. As it is, the thing's so perfectly genuine that we'd rather lose the chance and wait for some other bloke to find the money than run a chance of givin' the thing away. It's a matter o' business, simple and plain, that's all. It's a question of either of us trustin' you with a chance of collarin' £20,000, or you trustin' us with a paltry £50. We don't lay out no 'igh moral sentiments, we only say the weight o' money is all on one side. Take it or leave it, that's all. 'Ave another Scotch?"

The talk went on and the drinks went on, and it all ended, at "chucking-out time," in Reuben B. Hooker

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handing over five £10 notes, with smiling, though slightly incoherent, assurances of his eternal friendship for Luker and Birks.

In the morning he awoke to the realization of a bad head, a bad tongue, and a bad opinion of his proceedings of the previous night. In his sober senses it seemed plain that he had been swindled. All day he cursed his fuddled foolishness, and at night he made for the bar that had been the scene of the transaction, with little hope of seeing either Luker or Birks, who had agreed to be there to meet him. There they were, however, and, rather to his surprise, they made no demand for more money. They asked him if he understood music, and showed him the worn old piece of paper containing the *Flitterbat Lancers*. The exact spot, they said, where the jewels were hidden was supposed to be indicated somehow on that piece of paper. Hooker did not understand music, and could find nothing on the paper that looked in the least like a direction to a hiding-place for jewels or anything else.

Luker and Birks then went into full particulars of their project. First, as to its history. The jewels were the famous Wedlake jewels, which had been taken from Sir Francis Wedlake's house in 1866 and never heard of again. A certain Jerry Shiels had been arrested in connection with the robbery, had been given a long sentence of penal servitude, and had died in jail. This Jerry Shiels was an extraordinarily clever criminal, and traveled about the country as a street musician. Although an expert burglar, he very rarely perpetrated robberies himself, but acted as a sort of traveling fence, receiving stolen property and transmitting it to London or out of the country. He also acted as the agent of a man named Legg, who had money, and who financed any likely looking project of a criminal nature that Shiels might arrange.

Jerry Shiels traveled with a "pardner" — a man who played the harp and acted as his assistant and messenger in affairs wherein Jerry was reluctant to appear personally. When Shiels was arrested, he had in his possession a quantity of printed and manuscript music, and after his first remand his "pardner," Jimmy Snape, applied for the music to be given up to him, in order, as he explained, that he might earn his living. No objection was raised to this, and Shiels was quite willing that Snape should have it, and so it was handed over. Now among this music was a small slip, headed *Flitterbat Lancers*, which Shiels had shown to Snape before the arrest. In case of Shiels being taken, Snape was to take this particular slip to Legg as fast as he could.

But as chance would have it, on that very day Legg himself was arrested, and soon after was sentenced also to a term of years. Snape hung about in London for a little while, and then emigrated. Before leaving, however, he gave the slip of music to Luker's father, a rag-shop keeper, to whom he owed money. He explained

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its history, and Luker senior made all sorts of fruitless efforts to get at the information concealed in the paper. He had held it to the fire to bring out concealed writing, had washed it, had held it to the light till his eyes ached, had gone over it with a magnifying glass — all in vain. He had got musicians to strum out the notes on all sorts of instruments — backwards, forwards, alternately, and in every other way he could think of. If at any time he fancied a resemblance in the resulting sound to some familiar song-tune, he got that song and studied all its words with loving care, upside-down, right-side up — every way. He took the words *Flitterbat Lancers* and transposed the letters in all directions, and did everything else he could think of. In the end he gave it up, and died. Now, lately, Luker junior had been impelled with a desire to see into the matter. He had repeated all the parental experiments, and more, with the same lack of success. He had taken his "pal" Birks into his confidence, and together they had tried other experiments till at last they began to believe that the message had probably been written in some sort of invisible ink which the subsequent washings had erased altogether. But he had done one other thing: he had found the house which Shiels rented at the time of his arrest, and in which a good quantity of stolen property — not connected with the Wedlake case — was discovered. Here, he argued, if anywhere, Jerry Shiels had hidden the jewels. There was no other place where he could be found to have lived, or over which he had sufficient control to warrant his hiding valuables therein. Perhaps, once the house could be properly examined, something about it might give a clue as to what the message of the *Flitterbat Lancers* meant.

Hooker, of course, was anxious to know where the house in question stood, but this Luker and Birks would on no account inform him. "You've done your part," they said, "and now you leave us to do ours. There's a bit of a job about gettin' the tenants out. They won't go, and it'll take a bit of time before the landlord can make them. So you just hold your jaw and wait. When we're safe in the 'ouse, and there's no chance of anybody else pokin' into the business, then you can come and help find the stuff."

Hooker went home that night sober, but in much perplexity. The thing might be genuine, after all; indeed, there were many little things that made him think it was. But then, if it were, what guarantee had he that he would get his share, supposing the search turned out successful? None at all. But then it struck him for the first time that these jewels, though they may have lain untouched so long, were stolen property after all. The moral aspect of the affair began to trouble him a little, but the legal aspect troubled him more. That consideration, however, he decided to leave over for the present. He had no more than the word of Luker and Birks that the jewels (if they existed)

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were those of Lady Wedlake, and Luker and Birks themselves only professed to know from hearsay. At any rate, he made up his mind to have some guarantee for his money. In accordance with this resolve, he suggested, when he met the two men the next day, that he should take charge of the slip of music and make an independent study of it. This proposal, however, met with an instant veto.

Hooker resolved to make up a piece of paper, folded as like the slip of music as possible, and substitute one for the other at their next meeting. Then he would put the *Flitterbat Lancers* in some safe place, and face his fellow-conspirators with a hand of cards equal to their own. He carried out his plan the next evening with perfect success, thanks to the contemptuous indifference with which Luker and Birks had begun to regard him. He got the slip in his pocket, and left the bar. He had not gone far, however, before Luker discovered the loss, and soon he became conscious of being followed. He looked for a cab, but he was in a dark street, and no cab was near. Luker and Birks turned the corner and began to run. He saw they must catch him. Everything depended now on his putting the *Flitterbat Lancers* out of their reach, but where he could himself recover it. He ran till he saw a narrow passageway on his right, and into this he darted. It led into a yard where stones were lying about, and in a large building before him he saw the window of a lighted room a couple of floors up. It was a desperate expedient, but there was no time for consideration. He wrapped a stone in the paper and flung it with all his force through the lighted window. Even as he did it he heard the feet of Luker and Birks as they hurried down the street. The rest of the adventure in the court I myself saw.

Luker and Birks kept Hooker in their lodgings all that night. They searched him unsuccessfully for the paper; they bullied, they swore, they cajoled, they entreated, they begged him to play the game square with his pals. Hooker merely replied that he had put the *Flitterbat Lancers* where they couldn't easily find it, and that he intended playing the game square so long as they did the same. In the end they released him, apparently with more respect than they had before entertained, advising him to get the paper into his possession as soon as he could.

"And now," said Mr. Hooker, in conclusion of his narrative, "perhaps you'll give me a bit of advice. Am I playin' a fool-game running after these toughs, or ain't I?"

Hewitt shrugged his shoulders. "It all depends," he said, "on your friends Luker and Birks. They may want to swindle you, or they may not. I'm afraid they'd like to, at any rate. But perhaps you've got some little security in this piece of paper. One thing is plain: they certainly believe in the deposit of jewels themselves, else they wouldn't have taken so much trouble to get the paper back."

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"Then I guess I'll go on with the thing, if that's it."

"That depends, of course, on whether you care to take trouble to get possession of what, after all, is somebody else's lawful property."

Hooker looked a little uneasy. "Well," he said, "there's that, of course. I didn't know nothin' about that at first, and when I did I'd parted with my money and felt entitled to get something back for it. Anyway, the stuff ain't found yet. When it is, why then, you know, I might make a deal with the owner. But, say, how did you find out my name, and about this here affair being jined up with the Wedlake jewels?"

Hewitt smiled. "As to the name and address, you just think it over a little when you've gone away, and if you don't see how I did it, you're not so cute as I think you are. In regard to the jewels — well, I just read the message of the *Flitterbat Lancers*, that's all."

"You read it? Whew! And what does it say? How did you do it?" Hooker turned the paper over eagerly in his hands as he spoke.

"See, now," said Hewitt, "I won't tell you all that, but I'll tell you something, and it may help you to test the real knowledge of Luker and Birks. Part of the message is in these words, which you had better write down: *Over the coals the fifth dancer slides, says Jerry Shiels the horney.*"

"What?" Hooker exclaimed, "fifth dancer slides over the coals? That's mighty odd. What's it all about?"

"About the Wedlake jewels, as I said. Now you can go and make a bargain with Luker and Birks. The only other part of the message is an address, and that they already know, if they have been telling the truth about the house they intend taking. You can offer to tell them what I have told you of the message, after they have told you where the house is, and proved to you that they are taking the steps they talk of. If they won't agree to that, I think you had best treat them as common rogues and charge them with obtaining your money under false pretenses."

Nothing more would Hewitt say than that, despite Hooker's many questions; and when at last Hooker had gone, almost as troubled and perplexed as ever, my friend turned to me and said, "Now, Brett, if you haven't lunched, and would like to see the end of this business, hurry!"

"The end of it?" I said. "Is it to end so soon? How?"

"Simply by a police raid on Jerry Shiels's old house with a search warrant. I communicated with the police this morning before I came here."

"Poor Hooker!" I said.

"Oh, I had told the police before I saw Hooker, or heard of him, of course. I just conveyed the message on the music slip — that was enough. But I'll tell you all about it when there's more time; I must be off now. With the information I have given him, Hooker and his friends may make an extra push and get into the house soon, but I couldn't resist the

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temptation to give the unfortunate Hooker some sort of a sporting chance — though it's a poor one, I fear. Get your lunch as quickly as you can, and go at once to Colt Row, Bankside — Southwark way, you know. Probably we shall be there before you. If not, wait."

Colt Row was not difficult to find. It was one of those places that decay with an access of respectability, like Drury Lane and Clare Market. Once, when Jacob's Island was still an island, a little farther down the river, Colt Row had evidently been an unsafe place for a person with valuables about him, and then it probably prospered, in its own way. Now it was quite respectable, but very dilapidated and dirty. Perhaps it was 60 yards long — perhaps a little more. It was certainly very few yards wide, and the houses at each side had a patient and forlorn look of waiting for a metropolitan improvement to come along and carry them away to their rest.

I could see no sign of Hewitt, nor of the police, so I walked up and down the narrow pavement for a little while. As I did so, I became conscious of a face at a window of the least ruinous house in the row, a face that I fancied expressed particular interest in my movements. The house was an old gabled structure, faced with plaster. What had apparently once been a shop-window on the ground floor was now shuttered up, and the face that watched me — an old woman's — looked out from the window above. I had noted these particulars with some curiosity, when, arriving again at the street corner, I observed Hewitt approaching, in company with a police inspector, and followed by two unmistakable plainclothesmen.

"Well," Hewitt said, "you're first here after all. Have you seen any more of our friend Hooker?"

"No, nothing."

"Very well — probably he'll be here before long, though."

The party turned into Colt Row, and the inspector, walking up to the door of the house with the shuttered bottom window, knocked sharply. There was no response, so he knocked again, but equally in vain.

"All out," said the inspector.

"No," I said; "I saw a woman watching me from the window above not three minutes ago."

"Ho, ho!" the inspector replied. "That's so, eh? One of you — you, Johnson — step round to the back, will you?"

One of the plainclothesmen started off, and after waiting another minute or two the inspector began a thundering cannonade of knocks that brought every available head out of the window of every inhabited room in the Row. At this the woman opened the window, and began abusing the inspector with a shrillness and fluency that added a street-corner audience to that already congregated at the windows.

"Go away, you blaggards!" the lady said, "you ought to be 'orse-

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w'ipped, every one of ye! A-comin' 'ere a-tryin' to turn decent people out o' 'ouse and 'ome! Wait till my 'usband comes 'ome — 'e'll show yer, ye mutton-cadgin' scoundrels! Payin' our rent reg'lar, and good tenants as is always been — and I'm a respectable married woman, that's what I am, ye dirty great cow-ards!" — this last word with a low, tragic emphasis.

Hewitt remembered what Hooker had said about the present tenants refusing to quit the house on the landlord's notice. "She thinks we've come from the landlord to turn her out," he said to the inspector.

"We're not here from the landlord, you old fool!" the inspector said. "We don't want to turn you out. We're the police, with a search-warrant, and you'd better let us in or you'll get into trouble."

"'Ark at 'im!" the woman screamed, pointing at the inspector. "'Ark at 'im! Thinks I was born yesterday, that feller! Go 'ome, ye dirty pie-stealer, go 'ome!"

The audience showed signs of becoming a small crowd, and the inspector's patience gave out. "Here, Bradley," he said, addressing the remaining plainclothesman, "give a hand with these shutters," and the two — both powerful men — seized the iron bar which held the shutters, and began to pull. But the garrison was undaunted, and, seizing a broom, the woman began to belabor the invaders about the shoulders and head from above. But just at this moment the woman, emitting a terrific shriek, was suddenly lifted from behind and vanished. Then the head of the plainclothesman who had gone round to the back appeared, with the calm announcement, "There's a winder open behind, sir. But I'll open the front door if you like."

In a minute the bolts were shot, and the front door swung back. The placid Johnson stood in the passage, and as we passed in he said, "I've locked *'er* in the back room upstairs."

"It's the bottom staircase, of course," the inspector said; and we tramped down into the basement. A little way from the stairfoot Hewitt opened a cupboard door, which enclosed a receptacle for coals. "They still keep the coals here, you see," he said, striking a match and passing it to and fro near the sloping roof of the cupboard. It was of plaster, and covered the under-side of the stairs.

"And now for the fifth dancer," he said, throwing the match away and making for the staircase again. "One, two, three, four, five," and he tapped the fifth stair from the bottom.

The stairs were uncarpeted, and Hewitt and the inspector began a careful examination of the one he had indicated. They tapped it in different places, and Hewitt passed his hand over the surfaces of both tread and riser. Presently, with his hand at the outer edge of the riser, Hewitt spoke. "Here it is, I think," he said; "it is the riser that slides."

He took out his pocket-knife and scraped away the grease and paint from the edge of the old stair. Then a

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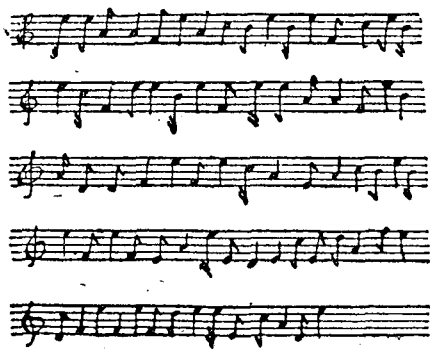
joint was plainly visible. For a long time the plank, grimed and set with age, refused to shift; but at last, by dint of patience and firm fingers, it moved, and in a few seconds was drawn clean out from the end.

Within, nothing was visible but grime, fluff, and small rubbish. The inspector passed his hand along the bottom angle. "Here's something," he said. It was the gold hook of an old-fashioned earring, broken off short.

Hewitt slapped his thigh. "Somebody's been here before us," he said, "and a good time back too, judging from the dust. That hook's a plain indication that jewelery was here once. There's plainly nothing more, except — except this piece of paper." Hewitt's eyes had detected — black with loose grime as it was — a small piece of paper lying at the bottom of the recess. He drew it out and shook off the dust. "Why, what's this?" he exclaimed. "More music!"

We went to the window, and there saw in Hewitt's hand a piece of written musical notation, thus:

Hewitt pulled out from his pocket a few pieces of paper. "Here is a copy I made this morning of the *Flitterbat Lancers*, and a note or two of my own as well," he said. He took a pencil, and, constantly referring to his own papers, marked a letter under each note on the last-found slip of music. When he had done this, the letters read:

You are a clever cove whoever you are but there was a cleverer says Jim Snape the horney's mate.

"You see?" Hewitt said, handing the inspector the paper. "Snape, the unconsidered messenger, finding Legg in prison, set to work and got the jewels for himself. The thing was a cryptogram, of course, of a very simple sort, though uncommon in design. Snape was a humorous soul, too, to leave this message here in the same cipher, on the chance of somebody else reading the *Flitterbat Lancers*."

"But," I asked, "why did he give that slip of music to Luker's father?"

"Well, he owed him money, and got out of it that way. Also, he avoided the appearance of 'flushness' that paying the debt might have given him, and got quietly out of the country with his spoils."

The shrieks upstairs had grown hoarser, but the broom continued vigorously. "Let that woman out," said the inspector, "and we'll go and report. Not much good looking for Snape now, I fancy. But there's some satisfaction in clearing up that old quarter-century mystery."

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We left the place pursued by the execrations of the broom wielder, who bolted the door behind us, and from the window defied us to come back, and vowed she would have us all searched before a magistrate for what we had probably stolen. In the very next street we hove in sight of Reuben B. Hooker in the company of two swell-mob-looking fellows, who sheered, off down a side turning at sight of our group. Hooker, too, looked rather shy at sight of the inspector.

"The meaning of the thing was so very plain," Hewitt said to me afterwards, "that the duffers who had the *Flitterbat Lancers* in hand for so long never saw it at all. If Shiels had made an ordinary clumsy cryptogram, all letters and figures, they would have seen what it was at once, and at least would have tried to read it; but because it was put in the form of music, they tried everything else but the right way. It was a clever dodge of Shiels's, without a doubt. Very few people, police officers or not, turning over a heap of old music, would notice or feel suspicious of that little slip among the rest. But once one sees it is a cryptogram (and the absence of bar lines and of notes beyond the stave would suggest that) the reading is as easy as possible. For my part I tried it as a cryptogram at once. You know the plan — it has been described a hundred times. See here — look at this copy of the *Flitterbat Lancers*. Its only difficulty — and that is a small one — is that the words are not divided. Since there are positions for less than a dozen notes on the stave, and there are 26 letters to be indicated, it follows that crotchets, quavers, and semiquavers on the same line or space must mean different letters. The first step is obvious. We count the notes to ascertain which sign occurs most frequently, and we find that the crotchet in the top space is the sign required — it occurs no less than eleven times. Now the letter most frequently occurring in an ordinary sentence of English is *e*. Let us then suppose that this represents *e*. At once a coincidence strikes us. In ordinary musical notation in the treble clef the note occupying the top space would be E. Let us remember that presently. Now the most common word in the English language is *the*. We know the sign for *e*, the last letter of this word, so let us see if in more than one place that sign is preceded by two others identical in each case. If so, the probability is that the other two signs will represent *t* and *h*, and the whole word will be *the*. Now it happens that in no less than four places the sign *e* is preceded by the same two other signs — once in the first line, twice in the second, and once in the fourth. No word of three letters ending in *e* would be in the least likely to occur four times in a short sentence except *the*. Then we will call it *the*, and note the signs preceding the *e*. They are a quaver under the bottom line for the *t*, and a crotchet on the first space for the *h*. We travel along the stave, and wher-

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ever these signs occur we mark them with *t* or *h*, as the case may be. But now we remember that *e*, the crotchet in the top space, is in its right place as a musical note, while the crotchet in the bottom space means *h*, which is no musical note at all. Considering this for a minute, we remember that among the notes which are expressed in ordinary music on the treble stave, without the use of leger lines, *d e* and *f* are repeated at the lower and at the upper part of the stave. Therefore, anybody making a cryptogram of musical notes would probably use one set of these duplicate positions to indicate other letters, and as *h* is in the lower part of the stave, that is where the variation comes in. Let us experiment by assuming that all the crotchets above *f* in ordinary musical notation have their usual values, and let us set the letters over their respective notes. Now things begin to shape. Look toward the end of the second line: there is the word *the* and the letters *f f t h*, with another note between the two *f* s. Now that word can only possibly be *fifth*, so that now we have the sign for *i*. It is the crotchet on the bottom line. Let us go through and mark the *i*'s. And now observe. The first sign of the lot is *i*, and there is one other sign before the word *the*. The only words possible here beginning with *i*, and of two letters, are *it*, *if*, *is* and *in*. Now we have the signs for *t* and *f*, so we know that it isn't *it* or *if*. *Is* would be unlikely here, because there is a tendency, as you see, to regularity in these signs, and *t*, the next letter alphabetically to *s*, is at the bottom of the stave. Let us try *n*. At once we get the word *dance* at the beginning of line three. And now we have got enough to see the system of the thing. Make a stave and put G A B C and the higher D E F in their proper musical places. Then fill in the blank places with the next letters of the alphabet downward, *h i j*, and we find that *h* and *i* fall in the places we have already discovered for them as crotchets. Now take quavers, and go on with *k l m n o*, and so on as before, beginning on the A space. When you have filled the quavers, do the same with semiquavers — there are only six alphabetical letters left for this — *u v w x y z*. Now you will find that this exactly agrees with all we have ascertained already, and if you will use the other letters to fill up over the signs still unmarked you will get the whole message:

"*In the Colt Row ken over the coals the fifth dancer slides says Jerry Shiels the horney.*

" 'Dancer,' as perhaps you didn't know, is thieves' slang for a stair, and 'horney' is the strolling musician's name for a cornet player. Of course the thing took a little time to work out, chiefly because the sentence was short, and gave one few opportunities. But anybody with the key, using the cipher as a means of communication, would read it easily.

"As soon as I had read it, of course I guessed the purport of the *Flitterbat Lancers*. Jerry Shiels's name is well-

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known to anybody with half my knowledge of the criminal records of the century, and his connection with the missing Wedlake jewels, and his death in prison, came to my mind at once. Certainly here was something hidden, and as the Wedlake jewels seemed most likely, I made the shot in talking to Hooker."

"But you terribly astonished him by telling him his name and address. How was that?" I asked curiously.

Hewitt laughed aloud. "That," he said; "why, that was the thinnest trick of all. Why, the man had it engraved on the silver band of his umbrella handle. When he left his umbrella outside, Kerrett (I had indicated the umbrella to him by a sign) just copied the lettering on one of the ordinary visitors' forms, and brought it in. You will remember I treated it as an ordinary visitor's announcement." And Hewitt laughed again.

Old Style Detection

A robbery was committed at a country house and a "Bow Street Runner" was sent for. He detected on the drive near the house a little hay, which convinced him that a hackney coach had been there. He went to the nearest turnpike, and asked if one had passed through it about such a time. The man said "Yes," but could not remember the number.

"It was 45," said a boy at play nearby.

The runner immediately returned to town, found No. 45, and summoned the driver before a magistrate. The man acknowledged that he had been out of town, but asserted that it was elsewhere.

The magistrate said, "Turn down his sleeves," knowing the custom of these men to place the turnpike tickets there, and that there was just the chance that he might not have given up the one that freed him back. It was so, and the ticket proved to be for the Essex route. The man peached and the robbers were taken.

—(*Source Unknown*)

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THE ADVENTURES OF TIMOTHY TRANT

DEATH AND CANASTA

by Q. PATRICK

THE BLONDE STOOD OUTSIDE THE door of the penthouse apartment, smiling extravagantly at Lieutenant Trant of the New York Homicide Bureau. She was as pretty as her strapless white evening gown and probably just about as frivolous. "I've come to grab Bill Sommers," she announced.

"Sorry, but he's away. He lent me this glamorous dump while my own rat hole's being painted."

The blonde pouted. "Oh, drat and fiddle-dee-dee."

"It's something important?"

"Desperate. Canasta." She nodded to the adjoining penthouse. "I'm Arlene Wentworth. We're all over there at the Evarts', and Molly's decided to take a headache to bed. I guess, if you're as rich as Molly you can afford as many headaches as husbands, but it's stuck us with three for Canasta. I loathe three-handed Canasta, particularly with a couple of men who're dying to murder each other. I thought Bill might make a fourth." She looked hopeful. "I don't suppose that you . . ."

Trant glanced at his watch. It was early — 9:30 o'clock.

"Delighted," he said.

In the luxurious living-room of the next penthouse, Arlene introduced him to the Evartses and to a dark, smoldering young man called Boyd Redfield. Trant, who kept a professional eye on the columns, knew Molly Evarts to be New York's most recent and richest music patron, currently on her third husband and rumored to be trading him in for Boyd Redfield, the latest thing in concert pianists. She was tall, bony, and terribly self-assured.

"How kind of you to understudy me, Mr. Trant." Above the soft Schubert on the radio, her voice sounded precise and affected. "Now I can go finish this symphony in a nice hot tub." She turned off the radio. "Without me, you won't be needing this."

Jim Evarts — was it racing autos or speedboats? — kissed his wife's ear. "Such a little music lover. She eats, breathes, and bathes New York City's own radio station these days."

"You should learn to love WNYC, too, dear." Molly Evarts patted his rugged blond face with ironic affection. "Splendid for the savage breast." She blew a rather toothy kiss at Redfield. "Good night all."

After about ten minutes during which Arlene chattered and Evarts

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and Redfield stonily ignored each other, Jim Evarts went to the kitchen for a tray of drinks and they assembled at the Canasta table.

"Arlene brings us down to her financial level, Trant," said Evarts. "Insists on a penny a hundred. Okay?"

"Fine."

Trant cut Arlene for his partner. The blonde's Canasta was much less dizzy than her chatter. Jim Evarts played well, if recklessly, but Boyd Redfield's conception of the game seemed largely to consist of admiring his own decorative reflection in the mirror which the lamp by his partner illuminated. They were still on the first game when a grandfather clock chimed eleven and, almost simultaneously, the lights went out.

"Ah!" screamed Arlene in mock alarm. "Eleven, the witching hour."

"A witching fuse, I'm afraid." Jim Evarts dropped his lighter, cursed, retrieved it, lit it, and groped his way out to the fuse-box in the kitchen. Soon the lights were on again and, in a lucky hand, Trant and Arlene made three natural canastas and drew the four red treys which put them out. They cut the same partners for the second and final game which Arlene and Trant won, too, for a grand total of 51 cents each.

Boyd Redfield paid Arlene, and Jim Evarts tossed Trant two quarters and a battered penny. Arlene, who was a little high, had started to kiss everyone good night. Suddenly she cried:

"Oh, drat and fiddle-dee-dee, you put my coat in Molly's bedroom, Jim. I'll have to disturb her." She grinned at Boyd. "Unless the Maestro'd like to do it for me."

Redfield flushed self-consciously. Arlene kissed him again. "Joke, darling. I'll get it."

She hurried out of the room. In a few seconds they heard a shrill scream. They all ran to find Arlene, white and shivering, at a bathroom door. Her bare, sun-tanned arms were dripping wet.

"She's there," she whimpered. "In the tub. I knocked to say goodbye. She didn't answer. I went in. I touched her. She's — dead."

The three men rushed through to the bathroom. Molly Evarts lay in the black-tiled tub. She was clearly dead. At her side, half-submerged in the water, was a table radio which had apparently fallen from a shelf by the tub's rim. Jim Evarts and Redfield lifted the body out and carried it into the bedroom. Trant, very alert, retrieved the radio from the tepid water. Its automatic station-button for WNYC was pressed down. He followed with it into the bedroom. Arlene was calling a doctor while the two men hovered.

"The radio!" Jim Evarts's face registered dazed understanding. "Molly was listening to that symphony. She must have bumped against the shelf and knocked the radio into the water, and . . ."

"Damn fool thing," cut in Red-

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field, "to let her have a radio in the bathroom. Everyone knows it's dangerous. The shock — it electrocuted her."

"I guess you're right," agreed Trant.

For several seconds now he had realized exactly how Molly Evarts had met her death. This was the most disappointingly rapid murder investigation of his career. He turned to Evarts. "Let's look at the fuse-box."

As the three men assembled in the kitchen, Redfield exclaimed: "Of course it happened when the lights fused. At eleven."

"No." Trant's voice was quiet. "She didn't die at 11."

"But . . ."

"See?" Trant indicated the pressed station-button on the radio he was still holding. "She'd been listening to WNYC. WNYC goes off the air at 10 o'clock. You can hardly imagine a music lover lying for a full hour in a tub listening to the dreary hum of a dead station."

"But it must have been 11," insisted Redfield. "When the radio hit the water, it must have blown the main fuse."

"Normally, of course, it would. But there are ways of preventing that." Trant surveyed the fuse-box. "You can, if you want, put any small metal object behind a fuse. It absorbs the shock and keeps the fuse from blowing."

He shifted his steady gray gaze to Jim Evarts. "I presume you knew your wife was planning to switch to Redfield here, so you thought you'd kill her while the money was still in the family."

There was a moment of incredulous silence.

"Quite ingenious. When you left to get us drinks in the kitchen, you slipped an obstruction behind the fuse for the bathroom circuit, went into the bathroom where your wife was listening to the symphony in her bath, and tilted the radio into the tub. You must have made sure that the radio actually touched her. Because of the obstruction behind the fuse, of course, the lights didn't go out. We couldn't suspect anything. But that's when you killed her — *before* we started to play Canasta."

He guided them into the living-room, pausing at the lamp behind the card table. "All you needed then was an alibi. It was a cinch. You had the chair next to this lamp. At 11 precisely, so we'd remember the time, you fused the lights in here. You undoubtedly had prepared the wall socket before with an insulated double-prong object which you must have kicked in with your heel. Whatever it was, you removed it from the socket when you pretended to drop your lighter in the darkness. And, of course, when you went to the kitchen to fix this fuse, you removed the obstruction from behind the bathroom fuse."

He threw out his hands. "Perfect. You'd planted Arlene's coat in your wife's bedroom so she'd be almost

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sure to discover the body. An obvious accident took place at 11, and there were three witnesses to prove you'd been in the living-room at the time." He smiled sadly. "But you should have taken your wife's advice and learned to love WNYC. Then you'd have known it would doublecross you by knocking off at 10."

"But this is crazy. Who are you anyway?" Jim Evarts's weathered face was ominous. "And all this about an obstruction behind the bathroom fuse. . . . What sort of obstruction? How can you prove . . . ?"

"Proof?" Trant took the change from his pocket and held up the battered penny which Evarts had given him as part of his Canasta winnings. "See how beat-up and pitted it is from the shock it absorbed? You bright murderers always get too bright. Probably, before I came into the picture, you'd planned to cache the penny somewhere. But I was an irresistible temptation. What a smooth way to dispose of a vital piece of evidence — to slip it to a poor unsuspecting jerk who'd come into your life by chance and who'd walk out of your life again carrying the penny neatly away from any police investigation. How were you to know that this particular jerk happened to be the police?"

He studied Jim Evarts, reflecting that it would be a long time before he played with racing autos again. Or was it speedboats?

"And you'd picked your witnesses with great finesse, too. Neither Arlene nor Redfield is exactly the Sherlock Holmes type. If I hadn't wandered in and inspired that final artistic flourish, you'd probably have got away with it."

He sighed.

"Too bad for you, Mr. Evarts, that Arlene loathes three-handed Canasta."

Hospitalized Veterans' Story Contest

Each year "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" gives its hospitalized veteran readers a chance to become writers and win awards totaling up to $100. Through the 8th Annual Contest of the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project, EQMM is awarding a $50 first prize, plus second, third, fourth, and honorary prizes for the best crime, mystery, or detective stories submitted. Veterans may get full rules by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Project, 1120 Lake Shore Dr., Chicago 11, Illinois, or by addressing the Project at the Empire State Bldg., N. Y. C. But hurry — contest closes April 15, 1954.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

BLOOD ON THE BOARDS *by WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT* (DUTTON, $2.50)	". . . like all Gault, ironic, vigorous and absorbing." (AB)	". . . the story's okay, with a relaxed style and excellent background." (LGO)
SHEPHERD'S CROOK *by E. C. R. LORAC* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	"Excellent in the English manner with a highly satisfactory solution." (FC)	". . . scenery is beautifully described, the story seems a bit too quiet." (LGO)
THE CASE OF THE GREEN-EYED SISTER *by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER* (MORROW, $2.75)	". . . enough . . . going on to keep you breathless for an evening." (AB)	". . . even an old trick shows up well in one of Perry's court scenes." (LGO)
CHRISTMAS AT CANDLESHOE *by MICHAEL INNES* (DODD, MEAD, $3.00)	"Although unpredictable, Michael Innes is always provocative." (DBH)	"To read this properly you must be equipped with a modicum of insanity . . . B plus." (LGO)
THE SAINT IN EUROPE *by LESLIE CHARTERIS* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	"It's all wild and exuberant fun." (AB)	". . . still incredibly handsome and wily — but the glory's departed." (LGO)
VICIOUS CIRCUIT *by JOHN LANGDON* (MACMILLAN, $2.50)	"There's first-rate background detail from a new writer . . ." (AB)	"Loads of adventure, good characterization. . . . Highly recommended." (FC)
CURTAIN FOR A JESTER *by FRANCES & RICHARD LOCKRIDGE* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	". . . even more the pure whodunit than most novels of Mr. and Mrs. North." (AB)	". . . excellent and fast moving adventure in trapping criminals." (FC)
THE CRIMSON CIRCLE *by EDGAR WALLACE* (CRIME CLUB, 25th Anniversary Classic, $2.50)	". . . not perhaps at his best but certainly at his most typical." (AB)	". . . no collector of crime classics would be complete without a Wallace . . ." (LGO)

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

A realistic and convincing story." (FP)	". . . most fun of the fortnight . . . fresh, lively material." (DBH)	
". . . extremely involved plot . . . slow developer . . . Rewarding." (AdV)	"Nice feeling of authenticity saves slow-paced, chatty yarn." (SC)	
". . . courtroom bombardment . . . leaves you limp and puzzled. Way below standard." (AdV)	"There is nothing better than a good Perry Mason. More, please, Mr. Gardner." (DBH)	
". . . a gay little exercise and not to be missed. Most welcome." (AdV)	"Grand-scale haunted house yarn more whimsical than ever." (SC)	
". . . quite entertaining. Good value." (AdV)	"He's as flip as ever." (SC)	
"Picture of . . . post-war Philippines timely, story curiously lifeless." (AdV)	"Stirring adventure and suspense in realistically sinister environment." (DD)	
"Extraordinarily complex plot with espionage twist. . . . Up to standard." (AdV)	". . . exciting . . ." (FP)	
". . . an excellent mystery. . . . Definitely worthy of rereading." (FC)	". . . first saw print in 1922 — and by 1939 it had topped 500,000. . . . Gothic revival." (SC)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

FP: *Fay Profilet in the Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

With "Tall Story," Margery Allingham begins a new series for EQMM — welcome news, indeed! You will meet Mr. Albert Campion again, but the toff-'tec in the hornrim spectacles plays only a minor role in these new stories. The man in the limelight this time is good old Charley Luke, Divisional Detective Chief Inspector. In "Tall Story," Luke — in his inimitable way — tells the fascinating circumstances of an "impossible crime" whose solution raised Charley from humble copper to the exalted position of being a member of London's famous C.I.D. The second story in what Miss Allingham calls her "Coppershop Tales" will appear in EQMM two months from now. It is titled "Mum Knows Best," and tells how the Chief Inspector's mother once helped him on a difficult case. And if all goes well, we hope to bring you more detective put-outs by Charley Luke, with Mr. Campion getting an occasional assist on the play. Luke and Campion could easily become the best double-play combination in the business!

TALL STORY

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

LONDON WAS HAVING ONE OF HER days. Outside, the streets glistened dully with half-frozen sludge, and the air was thick and dark and apparently contaminated with poison gas. But inside the varnished cabin which overhung the huge circular bar at the Platelayers' Arms, W. 2, there was still civilization, and even comfort.

In this nest, which possessed a private staircase direct to the street, privileged customers drank in all the privacy of a St. James's club, yet without sacrificing anything of the fog and freedom of the true hostelry. Mrs. Chubb, the licensee, who was a genius in such matters, called it "my little room."

Charley Luke, at that time the Divisional Detective Chief Inspector of the district, was sitting on the table, his muscles spoiling the cut of his civvie jacket and his hat pulled down over his eyes. He looked like a gangster, was as tough, and, with his live dark face and diamond-shaped eye-sockets, he lent a touch of badly needed theatre to the rest of us. We were about half a dozen, I suppose, no one of staggering distinction but all friends, resting for half an hour before

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making the routine after-work effort of tottering off home.

Mr. Albert Campion, owlish behind the hornrim spectacles for which he has set such a fashion, was chipping Luke gently and affectionately, like a man knocking out a favorite pipe.

"You put your success as a detective down to your height, Charles?" he was saying. "Really? You astound me. I shouldn't have thought it. Height of brow or merely length of leg?"

"Reach, chum." Luke was in fine ferocious form, his eyes snapping and his teeth gleaming in his dark skin. "And I wasn't talking of my success. I could do with a basinful of that and no error. I simply said that it was my height that got me into the C.I.D. I was on the beat, see?" He adjusted an imaginary helmet-strap, strained his Adam's apple against an imaginary tunic collar, and was away. We could see him, fifteen years younger, loping along, bright, eager, green as lettuce leaves. It was his great gift. As he spoke, whole pictures came alive, and people one had never heard of seemed to step into the room. Mr. Campion settled back, grinning.

"It was a night just like this," Luke went on, "cold and thick as a landlady's kiss, and my little beat, which was usually quiet at night except for the rats, had come alive for a change. Our D.I. was expecting a burglary." He blew out his cheeks, sketched himself a pair of flaring eyebrows and a waterfall mustache with a careless hand, and sped on with his narrative, having introduced us to a pleasantly worried personality without drawing a single extra breath. "Nervous!" he exclaimed. "Caudblimeah! I thought he was expecting to be a father — until 7 in the evening when the cars turned out. My sergeant took pity on me in the end and gave it to me clear. News had come through on the grapevine that 'Slacks' Washington, who was one of the slicker practitioners, had run out of money again, and had been seen taking sights round a little bookmaker's office in Ebury Court. From information received — and you know what that means" — he favored us with a wide-eyed leer which was somehow wholly feminine, and conjured up a traitress of a very definite kind — "they'd learned that tonight was the night. The bookie kept his cash in a safe which wouldn't keep out a pussycat, and besides, he was careless. He relied on the location of his office."

There was a square whiskey bottle on the mantelshelf — a dummy, as many generations of Ma Chubb's clients had discovered through the years. Luke stretched out a long arm and without rising took it up to demonstrate.

"This is just about the shape of Ebury Court," he explained, placing the bottle on its side. "There's a narrow tunnelled entrance off Commercial Road, two perfectly blank walls made of soot-blackened brick smarmed with posters, and at the end here — at the bottom of the bottle — is a little nest of offices. There's a way

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through in the daytime, but at night it is locked and for the purpose of this story it doesn't matter. The buildings are simple: a small printery on the ground floor, the bookie above, and a commercial art studio above that. Nothing to attract anybody, and all deserted at night."

He grinned at us. "Naturally, they could have cut short the whole exercise by merely stationing me in the passage," he said cheerfully; "but our D.I. wasn't wasting anything. Slacks was two and one-sixth yards of ill repute at that time. He was tall and thin and dangerous. He used a gun, he was dirty, and he stole." Luke measured two yards in the air as a woman does, with outstretched arm, and held his nose for a moment in the process. "A bad crook," he said. "So it was decided to take him with the stuff on him, just to make a nice clean open-and-shut case which no legal-eagle could muck up for us. It was also to be an object lesson to a collection of new young gentlemen from the C.I.D., and old Superintendent Yeo from the Yard was to be present himself just to hand out the congratulations."

He laughed joyfully. "Talk about a police net!" he said. "The trouble was to prevent it from looking like a fish queue caught in the rain. I was the only man allowed to show himself. I was to keep my usual time and to behave normal, and I was just bright enough to know that didn't mean stopping in a doorway for a couple of puffs. So off we went. There were police in the area, police on the tiles, police disguised as disappointed lovers waiting for their girls, police disguised as drunks singing in the gutter, police disguised as postmen, police disguised as police going home." He crossed his eyes and his fingers and made an idiot face.

"It was quite a do," he continued. "It was a wonder to me Slacks pushed past 'em all. There was no one else about. There never were many people around at that time of night. But the rain and the fog seemed to have cleared the district. By midnight I'd given up hope, but at a quarter to 1 Slacks showed up. He got off a bus on the corner, leaving the man who was tailing him to ride on as arranged, and came striding down the pavement with his raincoat flapping and his long legs making shadows under the street lamps. I recognized him at once from the pictures I'd been shown. He noticed me and said, 'Good night, officer,' as he passed. He was so much at ease that it was me who gave the guilty start. I made a police-like noise and strolled on."

The D.D.C.I. rubbed his cheek and miraculously we saw him as he must have been then — with skin like bright pink satin and the kitten-blue still in his eyes.

"Slacks went into the trap," he went on. "Walked straight into the court like a man in a hurry, which was the sensible way. The dark mouth of the tunnel swallowed him up, and after that you could have heard a cat hiccup.

"It had been arranged that the

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arrest should be made as he came out of Ebury Court. The idea was that, since he was known to be a dangerous bloke, the actual cop should be covered at all points. As I said, it was to be a demonstration. It was to be done like the book — neat, swift, and with the minimum of danger to all present. Since I'd done my little bit I walked back when I reached the boundary to see the performance. There it was, set out like a stage scene. There was a man on either side of the entrance, waiting to step forward and pin him. There was a car twenty paces up the road and another thirty paces down the road, both stationary, but with engines running. Opposite, there was a borrowed P.O. van with two fake postmen in attendance, and all round — hidden, they hoped — were the privileged audience. We waited, we waited, and we waited some more till we began to get windy. There had been time for Slacks to open twenty safes and count the money as well. I could feel our D.I. shaking although he was forty yards away. I knew what he felt like and I was puzzled, because I knew there was no other way out of that bottle at night, and the roofs were manned. I wondered if Slacks could have broken his leg or something, or knocked himself out perhaps with the bookie's scotch.

"And then, unexpectedly — between thought and thought, as it were — with no one quite ready in spite of everything, a revolver shot rang out clearly from inside the court. There was a yelp like the cry of a lost soul — whatever that's like — and someone came staggering out into the street. I recognized him and had the shock of my life. The men at the entrance of the tunnel caught him and he collapsed in their arms and died right there, poor chap, with a bullet through his windpipe. I was one of the first to get there, although there was soon a big enough crowd around. The D.I. charged up, spluttering."

Luke blew the imaginary waterfall-mustache in and out until we saw it for ourselves.

"The D.I. kept the watch on the archway intact, though. He was no fool, was the old man. He turned to me. 'Who the so-and-so is this, Constable?' he demanded as suspiciously as if he thought it was all my fault. 'Know him?' I said, 'Yessir' smartly, and I told him. He was a little runt named Church — some relation to the proverbial mouse, I think. He was a crank who spent all his time fly-posting for some Society he was interested in. I always remember those little posters of his. They were printed in emerald on yellow, and he stuck them wherever he could on the boardings, and quite illegally too. They said: YOU'VE GOT A RIGHT TO IT — and then in very small type, *Society of Humanity. Meeting Tuesday, Somewhere-or-other Hall.* That was all. The most innocent little chap alive.

"I went to one of his meetings once, but it emerged that the only thing I'd got a right to was the Speaker's views, and they didn't get me very far. Church was daft, that was all, a

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poor soft little bloke. He must have been hiding in the Court for hours, thinking all the ding-dong was for him. We could all see what had happened. He'd surprised Slacks and got the full benefit. 'Strewth, I was riled!"

Even at this distance Luke's diamond-shaped eyes grew narrow at the recollection.

"I was all for charging in like a hero and getting the next bullet," he went on with a lightning change of mood. "Mercifully I had no enemies among my superiors at that time and I was restrained. Finally, after sufficient conferences to start a Peace, old D.I. Everett went in himself. God bless him, he was a brave old boy. He had a bullet-proof shirt on, so his tummy was safe, but the etiquette of the period required him to rely on the natural armor-plating of his own skull, should Slacks aim high. He had four of his own boys behind him, but I got in next, there being no great competition.

"We found Slacks sitting on a packing case outside the printery, smoking and admiring the view. All things considered, he was quite affable."

Luke paused and eyed Mr. Campion. "You ought to have been there," he said. "It was like one of your tame pidgins. The crib was cracked, the cash was gone, Church's little pastepot and escapist literature were lying in the yard — but Slacks hadn't a bob of stolen money on him! Nor had he a gun. Everett's men took the whole place apart. It was the first time I'd ever seen a full-dress C.I.D. search and it opened my eyes. They took up the drains although anyone could smell they hadn't been disturbed for twenty years. They took the offices apart, they tapped the stones, they emptied the pastepot. So it wasn't what you're thinking. And meanwhile Slacks sat placidly in a nice warm room overlooking the river and swore he couldn't think what they were all talking about, and hadn't heard a shot or ever handled a gun, and whatever next?

"No one told me to go off duty so I stayed around and the place looked like the scoured inside of a well-kept saucepan. Finally the C.I.D. boys were called off. Old Everett was nearly out of his mind. He was standing alone in the middle of the court, with the sun shining down through the airshaft on his old bald head. The bookie, the printers, and the commercial artists were all besieging the entrance behind us, and he knew that sooner or later he'd have to let them in and lose the proofs forever. Since there was no one else there, he spoke to me.

" 'Where did he put it, Constable?' he said. 'Where in the name of gog-magog did he put that gun? — the gun and a wodge of money as big as a brick?'

"I cleared my throat. I was a bit husky when speaking to a D.I. in those days. 'He's a tall man, sir,' I said respectfully. He turned slowly and looked at me, and I remember I took my cape off and stretched up my

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hand. My reach was eight inches longer than his own. 'Church was a little man, sir,' I said, and then I pointed to one of the YOU'VE-GOT-A-RIGHT-TO-IT posters, which was a good two feet higher than the rest, slapped on in the very midst of an out-of-date cinema masterpiece which covered half a wall. He opened his mouth and said a word which was new on me. Hindustani, it was. He was an elderly man. He walked over and reached up. He wasn't tall enough, but I waited for orders and saw the look on his face when he gave them."

Luke sighed and on his dark face there was a gleam of remembered triumph.

"It was all there," he said, "in a little hole made by the erosion of a couple of bricks. The billposters always papered over it, but within a day or so the paper always rotted. Slacks, looking round wildly after the shot, must have guessed he was trapped. He saw the hole, shoved the loot and the gun inside, out of sight, and then, observing the pastepot and the bills, proceeded to use them.

"I remember the D.I. holding the stuff in his handkerchief. He was grinning all over his face, like this." Luke's smile was wonderful to see. "'You think I'm going to take the credit for this, my boy, don't you?' he said. I said, 'Yessir,' and he laughed. 'How right you are. Learnt anything?' I said, 'Yessir. Always take the paper off the wall, sir.' That made him laugh again. 'You'll do,' he said. 'You'd better report to me.' So that's how I joined the C.I.D."

Mr. Campion was laughing. "Brilliant observation," he remarked, "and — er — if I may say so, wonderful restraint on your part."

Luke chuckled and appealed to the rest of us.

"He always spots the second degree," he said. "Yes, of course you're right, chum. I saw it at once — just as soon as I stepped into the yard. That hole in the wall was where I kept my sandwiches. It was just high enough to be private. All the same, I had to wait my moment. Honor where honor is likely to be duly appreciated, you know."

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